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‘John Climacus and the Spiritual Tradition of the IV-VII centuries’  
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Ph.D. Thesis 2003

*ABSTRACT*

The main purpose of the thesis is to present the theology of John Climacus as a synthesis of the ascetic and mystical tradition of the IV-VII centuries, which was the period of the spiritual formation of monasticism.

Although Climacus does not present a systematic anthropology, he consistently uses anthropological vocabulary to convey spiritual experience, and shows the role of the body in it. (Chs. I&II).

A monk is primarily someone who prays. Why and how should one pray? What happens to man when he prays? How can one follow the commandment to pray unceasingly? What is the importance of tears? In his section dedicated to prayer, as well as throughout the book, Climacus provides a theology of prayer by answering these questions (Ch. III).

Angels and demons participate in the spiritual life of an individual, and Climacus is keen to explain to his readers the nature of this participation, with special reference to demons and their guile. (Ch. IV).

The *Scala Paradisi* is the first treatise to deal in a systematic way with the subject of what it means to be a monk. Becoming a monk is impossible in isolation from the tradition, which passes on the experience of the preceding generations to those that follow, thus spiritual fatherhood is of utmost importance (Chs. V&VI).

What is the true significance of love, its relationship with fear, and the importance of nuptial imagery? Climacus’ discussion on love embraces all the preceding topics, and summarizes his entire doctrine (Ch. VII).

# JOHN CLIMACUS AND THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION OF THE IV-VII CENTURIES

Andrey Kordochkin

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Ph.D. thesis  
University of Durham  
Department of Theology  
2003



28 FEB 2005

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I am grateful to Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) for suggesting me to make the *Scala Paradisi* the subject of my research, for his ongoing spiritual support and for representing an example of a shepherd, as portrayed by John Climacus in the concluding section of the *Ad Pastorem*. I also wish to express gratitude to Bishop Kallistos (Ware) for his inspiring suggestions; to Dr Sebastian Brock for the information on an obscure Syriac text; to Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB for introducing me to the world of the British *academia* and for providing hospitality during my visits to the Bodleian; to Archdeacon Stephen (Puchkov) for helping to gain access to important Russian texts; to Sergey Hovorun for his help with passages for which my Greek was not sufficient, and to Magnus Wheeler for proofreading this dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Durham, *Aid to the Church in Need* and *The Jerusalem Trust* for their financial assistance during my research. Without their support, this thesis would have never been written.



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### *Declaration*

I confirm that no part of the material has been previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University. Material from the works of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

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### *Note on the references*

For the sake of the reader's convenience, I have kept all patristic references within the text. In the references to the *Scala Paradisi*, the first reference relates to the pagination followed by the English editions of 1959 and 1978, the second one to the edition of the monk Sophronius, and the third one to the PG text. The pagination of Mark the Monk is given according to the SC edition, rather than according to the *Philokalia*. The abbreviations of the titles of his works are also derived from the SC edition. The numbering of the *Ascetic Homilies* of Isaac the Syrian is that the Holy Transfiguration Monastery edition. The abbreviations of the titles of texts, relating to the Pachomian *koinonia*, are those used by A. Vielleux in the English edition of these texts. I refer to the author of the Macarian corpus as Macarius of Egypt for the sake of convenience; this does not express an opinion on their true authorship. The translation of the Bible used is usually NRS. I have used the Holy Transfiguration monastery translation of Climacus, as well as other translations listed in the bibliography, occasionally modifying them.

## INTRODUCTION

As W. Völker has pointed out, the *Scala Paradisi* is a result of the long development of the ascetic tradition, which found its synthesis in the writings of Climacus. Comparing John Climacus to Maximus the Confessor, Völker affirms that the best way to explore the writings of Climacus is to study him in the light of earlier related writings, which enables the reader to appreciate both his originality and ability to synthesise<sup>1</sup>. This is precisely the path we are going to follow. Researching the writings of Climacus, we intend to explore the early period of formation of the spiritual tradition in the Christian East and see the place of Climacus in this tradition.

Before passing on to Climacus, we are going to present an overview of what we identify as the spiritual tradition of the IV-VII centuries. This was a period of organizational and spiritual formation of monasticism, which J.M. Hussey called 'the most vital single factor in Byzantine spirituality'<sup>2</sup>. By the seventh century, monks were no longer at the margins of the Church, but they were seen as custodians of the tradition of the Church – a role, which was only enhanced after iconoclasm and the role of the monks in its defeat. Writing a monastic history of this period is not our purpose – there are a number of good introductions, available to a modern reader<sup>3</sup>. However, we shall try to outline the spiritual history of the early monasticism, in as far as it is known from written sources.

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<sup>1</sup> *Scala Paradisi. Eine Studie zu Johannes Climacus und zugleich eine Vorstudie zu Symeon dem Neuen Theologen*. Wiesbaden. 1968. p.VI, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge Medieval History*. Vol. 4. *The Byzantine Empire*. Ed. by J.M. Hussey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1967. p. II. p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> To name only two: D. Chitty. *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the Study of Palestinian and Egyptian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966, M. Dunn. *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages*. Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers. 2000 (chs. 1-2).

The birthplace of monasticism was Egypt, and the father of monasticism is Anthony the Great (251 – c.355), whose *Vita* is attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria (c.295 - 373). Not only was the *Vita* to become a standard of hagiographic writing – it became a handbook for the subsequent generation of monks, as it gave, in the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, a ‘law’ (νομοθεσία) of monastic life (*Or.* 21.5). There is hardly any theme in later monastic writings which had not been outlined in the *Vita*. The main theme, however, is the bodily and spiritual transformation of man, which comes as a result of the ascetic struggle, of a discipline combining prayer, fasting and labour. Anthony became the spiritual father to thousands of Egyptian monks, whose lives are described in such writings as *Apophthegmata Patrum*, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* and Palladius’ *Historia Lausiaca*.

The birth of community monasticism is associated with Pachomius, the contemporary of Anthony (c.292 - 347). There are a number of documents which illustrate the life of the first coenobium, consisting of three thousand inhabitants. No longer was monastic life spontaneous and disorganized – the monks were all bound together by one rule and subject to the authority of Pachomius through internal hierarchy.

Basil the Great (c.330 - 379), having had first-hand knowledge of Egyptian monasticism, is known as an organizer of monasticism in Asia Minor. Basil’s writings present a picture of the coenobitic monastic life (although the word “monk” is never used), which is integrated into the social and liturgical life of the Church. Basil thought that the unity of monasticism with the main body of the Church could be maintained, in Meyendorff’s words, ‘by preserving moderation in ascetic precepts and, on the other hand, in setting up the ascetic ideal as a

pattern for all Christians'<sup>1</sup>. Looking at the writings of Climacus, we see that he was probably more inspired by Gregory of Nazianzus (c.330 - 390) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-340 – c.394) – although the name of Gregory of Nyssa is not mentioned in the *Scala*. While it would be a sign of superficiality to oppose Basil the Great to Gregory of Nyssa, the mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa seems to have appealed more to Climacus than Basil's vision of the community life. If L. Bouyer was right in saying that 'the monastic life of the East ... has never ceased to tend, even through cenobitism, towards anchoritism'<sup>2</sup>, in Climacus it is easy to find support for this statement: 'Why did the holy fathers of Tabennisi never have so many lights as those of the Skete? Those of you, who can, understand this. I cannot speak, or, rather, I do not wish to.' (27.32 = 27-2.3 = 1105C) This is an important theme, to which a separate discussion will be devoted.

The key figure in the early spirituality was Evagrius (c.345 - 399). To him Orthodox spirituality owes the integration of the Classical anthropological vocabulary into monastic language. He has summarized the experience of the desert and provided a vocabulary to describe inner life, which has been used by generations of monastic writers, including Climacus. His scheme of the eight major passions, his understanding of individual *πάθη* and *ἀπάθεια* penetrated the entire Orthodox tradition. Although his authority was undermined by his condemnation in 553, his influence upon the later tradition cannot be overestimated. His cosmology has been discarded, but his main spiritual treatises have become classics, partly due to the fact that some of them were ascribed to

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<sup>1</sup> J. Meyendorff. *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's University Press, 1982. p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Christian Spirituality*. Vol. 1, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*. London: Burns&Oates Ltd, 1963. p. 341.

other writers, mainly Nilus of Sinai. Evagrian language and concepts occur frequently in Climacus<sup>1</sup>.

Another important 4<sup>th</sup> century figure was the author of the *Macarian Homilies*. While this is not the place to discuss specific issues such as Messalianism or the dependence of Macarius upon Gregory of Nyssa (or vice versa), it is important to indicate that, although Macarius discusses many similar subjects to Evagrius, such as the liberation of soul from πάθη, he elaborates on other themes, such as co-existence of sin and grace, unceasing prayer etc. In the Orthodox tradition there have been no doubts of the orthodoxy of the Macarian corpus, and it was to become one of the handbooks of spirituality.

The writings of John Cassian (c.360 – c.435) have been extremely influential both in the East and in the West. His main achievement was transmitting to the West his experience of the Egyptian monasticism. Cassian's writings contain numerous Evagrian notions, such as the eight passions and *puritas cordis*, which corresponds to the Evagrian ἀπόθεια.

*Historia Lausiaca*, written by Palladius in 419-420, as well as the *Historia Monachorum* (394) also provide important evidence for both the history and the spirituality of the early monasticism. The two works are similar in genre. While the *Historia Monachorum* is written in a more popular style and presents a simpler approach, the *Historia Lausiaca* betrays the influence of Evagrius, whom Palladius knew personally.

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<sup>1</sup> It is extraordinary how tendentious Climacus and his contemporaries (e.g. Maximus the Confessor) are in their attitude to Origen and Evagrius, whilst at the same time being greatly indebted to them. This explained by the fact that the 5<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council condemned Origen and his followers in 553. Another contemporary of Climacus, Isaac the Syrian, admires Evagrius, as the Syrian Church of the East, having rejected the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council, rejected all the following ones. Earlier writers, such as Barsanuphius and John, although being cautious, are more favourable to Evagrius (*Corr.* 600, 602). Their disciple Dorotheos is also sympathetic to Evagrius, quoting him a number of times.



Somewhat aside from the *Historia Monachorum* and the *Historia Lausiaca* are the *Apophthegmata* collections. Although many characters described in them are the same as in the other two narratives, the *Apophthegmata* were compiled over a longer span of time, and reflect the spirit not only of early Egyptian monasticism, but also of the later Palestinian tradition, to which we probably owe these compilations<sup>1</sup>.

The 5<sup>th</sup> century writers relevant to our research are Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photice (c.400 - 474). The distinctive feature of Mark the Monk is the connection between one's spiritual life and baptism – it is baptismal grace, which is at work and it is the baptismal vows which are to be observed. While Diadochus also emphasises the significance of baptism, other themes are elaborated, especially the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ.

The emergence of Palestinian monasticism is associated with the names of Chariton and Hilarion, who founded the first monastic settlements in the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Palestinian monasticism provided the institution of *lavra* – scattered cells, grouped around a church and communal buildings. Coenobitic monasteries were also found by Euthymius and Sabas. One of the main sources of knowledge of Palestinian monasticism are the *Vitae* of Cyril of Skythopolis, which cover the span of the entire 5<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Besides the *Vitae* of Cyril, the tradition of Palestinian monasticism finds expression in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century) as well as in the writings of their disciple Dorotheos. The 848 letters of Barsanuphius and John deal with a vast number of queries, relating to both solitary and coenobitic life. The Gaza fathers answer

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<sup>1</sup> The chronology of *Apophthegmata* and the relationship between the different collections has been debated. For a short survey see Gould, G. *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1993. pp. 5-17.

questions with precision; their style sometimes recalls the *Apophthegmata*. I. Hausherr distinguishes two main themes in their *Correspondence*: fidelity to the tradition and the necessity of discernment<sup>1</sup>. Other important themes are also present, such as the remembrance of God, the invocation of the name of Christ, and others. Dorotheos of Gaza develops their key themes, especially those relating to life in a community

*Pratum Spirituale* (c. 600) is a collection of anecdotes from the monasteries of Palestine, Sinai and Egypt. While the issues of spiritual life are not discussed at length, this is also an important source of knowledge of monasticism of the period prior to Climacus.

### ***Historical excursus: monasticism on Sinai***

There are some scattered references to monastic life on Sinai, relating to the period prior to the seventh century. One of the earliest relevant references to monasticism on Sinai occurs in Sozomen, who describes Silvanus, a native of Palestine, who practiced asceticism in Egypt and then lived on Sinai, before finally settling in Palestine (*Hist.* VI.32). R. Devreesse identifies him with the Silvanus we read about in the *Apophthegmata*<sup>2</sup>. Even if Sozomen speaks about a different Silvanus, in the *Apophthegmata* there are numerous stories about monks in Pharan and Mount Sinai. We also possess a letter, dated 453, written by emperor Marcian to bishop Macarius and monks of Sinai, which he calls 'the dwelling of devoutness and the approach of holy men'<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Barsanuphe. DS. Vol. I. col. 1256.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Christianisme dans la Péninsule Sinaitique, des origines à l'arrivée des Musulmans. Revue Biblique.* April 1940. p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> ACO II: 491. English text in: P.R. Coleman-Norton. *Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535.* London: SPCK, 1966. 3 vols. Vol. 2. pp. 830-834.

One of the more detailed accounts of monastic life on Sinai comes from Egeria, who visited Sinai in the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> / beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>1</sup>. It was the peak of the mountain of Sinai which was the focus of pilgrimages, as well as Horeb and the site of the burning bush, where a church was built. Egeria emphasises the hospitality of the monks (*monachi*), abiding in cells (*monasteria*) which surrounded the mountain (3). The monks guided pilgrims around holy places, shared meals with them and celebrated the Liturgy at their request (4). Egeria describes rather sentimentally how, following the Sunday Liturgy in the chapel on the top of the mountain, the pilgrims were given gifts (*eulogias*) by the monks (3). According to Theodoretus of Cyrus, the chapel, which Egeria describes, was build by Julian Saba (*Historia Religiosa* II.13). Symeon the Elder, also decribed by Theodoretus, must have been a contemporary of Egeria. Theodoretus describes his encounter with a monk on Sinai, who inhabited ‘a tiny hole such as foxes are wont to make when they contrive dens for themselves’. His appearance was in keeping with his accomodation: ‘He was wild to look at, with unkempt hair, shrivelled face, the limbs of the body reduced to a skeleton, dressed in some dirty rags sewn together with palm shoots’. His food was dates, brought by a lion, which he was happy to share with guests (*Ibid.* VI.7-10).

Sulpitius Severus (c.360-c.420) also presents an account of the Postumianus’ encounter with one of the inhabitants of Sinai: ‘I saw the Red Sea and the ridges of Mount Sinai, the top of which almost touches heaven, and cannot, by any human effort, be reached. An anchorite was said to live somewhere within its recesses: and I sought long and much to see him, but was unable to do so. He had for nearly fifty years been removed from all human

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of the dates of Egeria’s piligrimage, see Gingras. *Introduction. to Diary of a Pilgrimage*. Tr. and ann. by G. E. Gingras. Newman Press 1970 (ACW 38). pp. 12-15.

fellowship, and used no clothes, but was covered with bristles growing on his own body, while, by Divine gift, he knew not of his own nakedness. As often as any pious men desired to visit him, making hastily for the pathless wilderness, he shunned all meeting with his kind. To one man only, about five years before my visit, he was said to have granted an interview; and I believe that man obtained the favour through the power of his faith. Amid much talk, which the two had together, the recluse is said to have replied to the question why he shunned so assiduously all human beings, that the man who was frequently visited by mortals like himself, could not often be visited by angels. From this, not without reason, the report had spread, and was accepted by multitudes, that that holy man enjoyed angelic fellowship.' (*Dial.* I. 17).

In the narrative of Ammonius, which describes the slaughter of the Sinaite monks in 373, we may find evidence, related to the Saracens and their attacks on the monks. According to Ammonius, monks only gathered on Saturday evening for the *synaxis*, to withdraw into their cells afterwards.

This information conforms to the *Narrationes* of Nilus of Sinai, which relate to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> / beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Nilus also specifies the distance, at which the monks lived from one another – twenty or more *stadia* (*Narrat.* III PG 79. 620C). While some monks built huts, others inhabited caves, supporting themselves with agriculture or depending upon the wild vegetables and fruits (*Ibid.* III PG 79. 613D – 616A) Like Ammonius, Nilus also describes the attacks by Saracens, from whom the monks escaped to the Sinai mount. The Saracen attacks were largely the reason behind Emperor Justinian's decision to build a church and *castrum* – an event testified to by Procopius (*De Aedif.*

V.VIII). Besides monastic presence on Sinai, Procopius describes the church dedicated to the Mother of God and the fortress, both built by Emperor Justinian.

Another interesting account is that of an anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza, who visited Sinai around 555-563. Describing his arrival at Sinai, he writes: 'Here, behold a multitude of monks and hermits! Bearing crosses and singing psalms, they came to meet us, and, falling upon the ground, they did reverence to us. We also did likewise, shedding tears'. He describes three monks who knew Latin, Greek, Syriac, Egyptian and Persian, as well as many interpreters from single languages<sup>1</sup>. The pilgrim refers to a curious custom of shaving the hair and beard on the peak of Sinai (XXVII).

Another writer who is a later contemporary of Climacus was Anastasius of Sinai. His *Narrationes* describe Sinai as a colony of anchorites rather than a coenobium with dependencies. According to Anastasius, monks received initial training in the monastery before withdrawing to the cells, and the relationship between the monks and the Saracens was generally good.

It has been suggested that by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> / the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries no more than a hundred monks inhabited the monastery<sup>2</sup>. Archaeological research provides evidence for the existence of a few dozen monastic settlements in the region of the Sinai mountain, providing accommodation for anything between a single hermit or a small group of monks, who would support themselves by agriculture. Due to the climate of Sinai, the monks' diet consisted mainly of fruit and vegetables, rather than of bread, which

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<sup>1</sup> Curiously, Col. Sir Wilson, annotating the English translation in the end of the XIX century, commented that 'monks are now quite illiterate'.

<sup>2</sup> Dahari, U. *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period: the Archaeological Remains*. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000. p. 63.

had to be imported from Egypt<sup>1</sup>. The monastery was also a pilgrimage centre. Pilgrim groups often consisted of several hundred pilgrims each; many of them came from Armenia and Georgia<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Editions of Climacus***

No critical edition of the *Scala Paradisi* exists at present. The principle text of the *Scala* is of that of the Jesuit scholar Matthaeus Raderus (Rader). It was published in Paris in 1633, and reprinted in the PG. Rader used eight manuscripts as his chief sources (PG 621-2). Another text in circulation is that edited by the monk Sophronius, published in Constantinople in 1883, and reprinted in Greece a number of times since. Sophronius based his text on a number of manuscripts from the library of Dionysiou monastery on Mount Athos. Besides the differences in the text, the two editions have two slightly different chapter numberings. The chapters 16 and 17, dedicated to avarice and non-possessiveness in the PG, in Sophronius' text constitute one chapter, numbered 16. At the same time, the section on the 'unmentionable blasphemous thoughts', which in the PG text may be found in the end of the end of chapter 23, in Sophronius' text is found as a separate chapter 23. Thus, both editions consist of 30 chapters, not including *Ad Pastorem*, which Sophronius classifies as chapter 31.

### ***Studies of Climacus***

The principle and definitive study of the *Scala Paradisi* is the monograph by Völker, which bears the Latin title of the original. As with the other works of this scholar, this book is an impeccable example of German scholarship. Völker,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 159-161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164.

however, analyses the *Scala* step by step, rather than asking questions relating to the entire text.

J. Chryssavgis' '*Ascent to Heaven*' is dedicated especially to Climacus' anthropology. Anthropology on this occasion is to be understood in the broad sense of the word, as Chryssavgis also covers many subjects, which strictly speaking do not relate to the constitution of the human person, such as ascetic struggle, spiritual guidance etc. Chryssavgis provides a good analysis of the text, although his approach tends to be descriptive and analytical rather than critical: there are many questions one might ask, reading Climacus, which Chryssavgis sadly does not ask. Although he acknowledges that 'at times, Saint John seems to blur the distinction in terminology'<sup>1</sup> regarding heart and mind, he seems to ascribe to Climacus a consistent anthropology, which in our opinion he does not have. Thus, we were hesitant to dedicate separate sections to heart and mind, as they interrelate too closely. Discussing the role of the body, Chryssavgis fails to acknowledge that Climacus does use language, which is clearly dualistic.

The monograph of C. Yannaras dedicated to Climacus 'metaphysics of the body' has not been translated from Greek and remains unavailable to us. However, his summary of the monograph<sup>2</sup>, written without a single reference to any primary or secondary source except for the *Scala*, suggests that Yannaras used the *Scala* as a foundation for his own theological constructions instead of embarking on a scholarly and critical analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ascent to Heaven. The Theology of the Human Person according to Saint John of the Ladder*. Holy Cross Orthodox Press. 1989. p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> C. Yannaras. *Eros divin et éros humain selon s. Jean. Climaque. Contacts*. 21. 1969. pp. 190-204.

The papers of the conference dedicated to Climacus organised by the community of Bose, have been recently published<sup>1</sup>. They cover many interesting issues, including the reception of Climacus in the East and in the West.

Some shorter introductions are also available. Both the entry of G. Couilleau in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*<sup>2</sup> and the introduction of K. Ware to the CWS edition of the *Scala* provide balanced accounts of Climacus' writings.

The monograph of J.R.Martin<sup>3</sup> is dedicated especially to manuscript illustrations to the *Scala*, while that of J. Bogdanovich<sup>4</sup> deals specifically with the reception of Climacus in later Byzantine and Serbian literature.

### ***Dates of Climacus***

Climacus' dates have been the subject of debate. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, F. Nau suggested that Climacus was born before 579 and died around 649<sup>5</sup>. Nau based his argument on Narrative 32, attributed to Anastasius of Sinai, and for which he gave 650 as the *terminus ante quem*. Nau identified the abbot Anastasius as the latter patriarch of Antioch, and, as the narratives mention that Climacus died a year before their composition, Nau made a conclusion regarding Climacus' dates.

Nau's arguments were rejected by Beneshevich, who believed the abbot Anastasius in question to have been an earlier figure, who became an abbot

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<sup>1</sup> *Giovanni Climaco e il Sinai*. Edizioni Qiqajon. Comunità di Bose. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VIII. cols. 369-389.

<sup>3</sup> J.R. Martin. *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*. Studies in manuscript illumination, 5. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Dimitrie Bogdanovich. *Jovan Lestvichnik u vizantijskoy i staroy serbskoy knizhevnosti*. Belgrade, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> *Note sur la date de la mort de S. Jean Climaque*. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*. XI. 1902.. pp. 35-37, *Le texte grec des Récits du moine Anastase sur les saints peres du Sinai*. *Oriens Christianus*. II, 1902, pp. 58-59.



before 552. Beneshevich concluded that John Climacus was himself abbot of Sinai from 592 to 596<sup>1</sup>.

Petit proposed that Climacus should be identified with a monk, to whom the *Pratum Spirituale* refers as 'John Scholasticus' (70) and Sophronius refers as 'John Rhetor' (PG 87. 3673A). Thus, he believes that Climacus died around 680, but later than 670. However, on the basis of these texts, Petit assumes that Climacus was married before entering ascetic life, which contradicts the *Vita* and remains speculative<sup>2</sup>.

There has been another recent attempt to suggest the dates of Climacus' life, based on the narratives of Anastasius, which a modern scholar dates 670-680<sup>3</sup>, and thus suggesting c. 670 as a possible date for Climacus' death<sup>4</sup>.

It is difficult to reach a decisive conclusion on Climacus' dates. However, judging from the fact that, on the one hand, Climacus is not explicitly mentioned in the *Pratum*, which describes the events of 580-590, and on the other hand is himself silent about the Arab occupation of Cairo (640) or the outbreak of the monothelite controversy, it would seem sensible to suggest that Climacus was in the office of abbot in the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Discussing the dates of Climacus is relevant to a letter, written by Gregory the Great in 600 and addressed to 'John, abbot of Sinai' (XI.I). Gregory writes: 'Do you, then, who live a tranquil life in the so great serenity of your rest, and stand as it were safe on the shore, extend the hand of your prayer to us who are on your voyage, or rather who are suffering shipwreck, and with all the

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<sup>1</sup> *Sur la date de la mosaïque de la Transfiguration au Mont Sinai. Byzantion* 1. 1924. pp. 168-172.

<sup>2</sup> DTC. Vol. VIII. cols. 690ff

<sup>3</sup> A. Bingelli. *Anastase le Sinait. Récits sur le Sinait et Récits utiles l'âme, I-II*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Paris-Sorbonne. 2001. pp. 332-334.

<sup>4</sup> B. Flusin. *Il Monachesimo Sinaitico al tempo di Giovanni Climaco*. In: *Giovanni Climaco e il Sinai*. Edizioni Qiqajon. Comunità di Bose. 2002. p. 31

supplications in your power help us as we strive in the land of the living, so that not only for your own life, but also for our rescue, you may have reward forever.’ The letter concludes with the description of the gift of 15 cloaks, 30 *rachanae*<sup>1</sup> and 15 beds, as well as of the money donation. Was it Climacus who was the recipient of the letter? It is generally agreed that he was<sup>2</sup>. P. Maraval believes that Climacus could not be the recipient on the basis of the presumption, that he did not become the abbot of Sinai until 639<sup>3</sup> – a statement, which is itself uncertain and is in need of argumentation. A strong argument in favour of Climacus as the recipient is the tone of the letter, which implies that it is addressed with reverence to someone who has achieved sanctity – as we know from the *Vita*, Climacus’ reputation as an ascetic was high even in his own lifetime. However, if Bingelli gives a correct date for Anastasius’ *Narrationes*, and Anastasius himself is accurate about his chronology, Climacus could not have been the recipient.

### ***Life of Climacus***

Our main source for Climacus’ life is the *Vita*, ascribed to Daniel of Raithou (PG 596-608). It is accompanied by another narrative, which fills in some lacunae of the *Vita* (PG 608-609). The author does not inform us about Climacus’ place of birth or childhood, simply saying that he was 16 when he came to Sinai. The *Vita* seems to imply that Climacus began his monastic life following what he himself calls ‘the middle path’ – living outside of a monastery

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<sup>1</sup> The precise meaning of the word is uncertain.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> series. Vol. 13. p. 296. n.1, H. Scrobucha, *Sinai*. London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1966. p. 37, J. Hofman. *Sinai und Rom*. In: *Orientalia Christiana* 9. 1927. p. 223, J. Hofman. *Lettere Pontificie edite et inedite intorno ai monasteri del monte Sinai*. In: OCP 17. 1951. p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> P. Maraval. *Grégoire et les Lieux Saints*. In: *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempo*. Rome. 1991. Vol. 2. p. 67.

under the guidance of an elder, whom the narrative identifies as Abba Martyrius. It was then that Anastasius the Great predicted that Climacus was to become the abbot of the Sinaite monastery. Then, when Climacus was 19 years of age (or 19 years after his monastic profession – the *Vita* is not entirely clear) Climacus became a hermit in a place called Thola, where he spent the next 40 years ‘consumed with ἔρως and the fire of divine ἀγάπη’, as his biographer informs us. Daniel describes his asceticism, emphasising that he did not go to extremes, giving the example of διόκρισις, which Climacus himself exalted in the *Scala*. Climacus then became an abbot of the monastery, but it is not known for how long he held the office. We are only told that Climacus had a brother according to flesh, whom Climacus appointed as his successor before death.

### ***Genre of Climacus***

Within the *Scala* one discovers a variety of genres. The main body of the book consists of *capita* in apophthegmatic and aphoristic style; the text is full of metaphors and imagery, understandable to a broad category of readers. Climacus likes to personify both vices and virtues, which gives the text a more dramatic effect. However, the letter to John, Abbot of Raithou, as well as the concluding section of *Ad Pastorem*, may be described as a eulogy in genre, being emphatic and rhetorical, with plenty of poetic imagery. Having carefully analysed the text of the *Scala*, J. Duffy finds a number of qualities in Climacus’ prose, which are associated with the Byzantine liturgical writing of the period contemporary to Climacus, e.g. the prose sermons of Sophronius of Jerusalem and the sermons belonging to the genre of *kontakion*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Duffy. *Embellishing the Steps: Elements of Presentation and Style in The Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*. DOP 53. 1999. pp. 1-17.

## *Sources of Climacus*

It has been suggested that the sources of Climacus were 'not numerous'<sup>1</sup>. It seems to us that, on the contrary, the *Scala* can be seen as a synthetic work - in spite of the fact that Climacus draws largely on his own experience, for 'it is unseemly for teachers to give instruction from notes taken from other men's writings' (*Ad Past.* 5 = 1165C). In accordance with the ancient custom, Climacus makes few specific references to his sources. As far as classical authors are concerned, Climacus once mentions 'the Greeks', who define philosophy as 'meditation on death' (μελέτη θανάτου) (6.24 = 6.26 = 797C). Although the definition occurs in Plato (*Phaedo* 67e), Climacus could have picked it up in Christian authors, such as Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.11.67), Eusebius (*Praep. Evangel.* 11.27.18), Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or.* 27.7), Evagrius (*Pract.* 52), and Cyril of Skythopolis (*Vita Cyriaci* 230). In this context, Procopius' description of monastic life on Sinai should be recalled. Describing the Sinai monastery, he writes: 'On this Mount Sinai live monks whose life is a careful rehearsal of death (μελέτη θανάτου), and they enjoy without fear the solitude which is very precious to them' (*De Aedif.* V.VIII).

The Christian authors who Climacus refers to by name are John Cassian (4.105 = 4.105 = 717B), Gregory of Nazianzus (22.1 = 21.1 = 949A, 26.135 = 26-2.19 = 1064A, 28.51 = 28.52 = 1137C), and Ephrem the Syrian, to whom he refers simply as 'ὁ Σύρος' (29.8 = 29.5 = 1148D). Climacus also mentions Origen (who is referred to as 'godless' 5.41 = 5.29 = 780D) and Evagrius, who is referred to as 'afflicted by an evil spirit' (14.12 = 14.8 = 865A). Climacus also refers to the examples from the *Apophthegmata* (4.106 = 4.106 = 717C cf. *Alph.*

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<sup>1</sup> S. Rabois-Bousquet. *Saint Jean Climaque: sa vie et son oeuvre. Echos d'Orient* 22. 1923. p. 450.

John the Theban, 19.7 = 18.6 = 937D cf. *Alph.* Anthony 1, 15.30 = 15.27 = 885C cf. *Alph.* Anthony 14, 29.5 = 25.3 = 1148C cf. Tithoes 1, 29.8 = 29.5 = 1148D cf. *Alph.* Anthony 32, 29.8 = 29.5 = 1148D cf. *Alph.* John the Dwarf 13, 27.64 = 27-2.29 = 1112D cf. *Alph.* Arsenius 7, 25.44) and from Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca* (25.44 = 25.40 = 997C cf. *Historia Lausiaca* 37.16). No other direct references are made, and finding out the other sources of Climacus' theology is one of the main tasks of this work.

The possible influence of Mark the Monk upon Climacus has been investigated by K. Ware in his doctoral dissertation on Mark the Monk (sadly unpublished). K. Ware finds two quotations in the *Scala* from Mark the Monk (15.76 = 15.74 = 897C cf. *Leg.* 120 and 23.5 = 22.6 = 965D cf. *Leg.* 136), which together with four possible reminiscences (4.108 = 4.109 = 717D cf. *Justif.* 52, 14.21 = 14.17 = 868A, 15.39 = 15.37 = 888C cf. *Leg.* 109, 22.1 = 21.1 = 949A cf. *Bapt* V.62-63, 26.69 = 26.43 = 1028B cf. *Justif.* 25), Climacus' repetition of Mark's phrase 'ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ καὶ τόπῳ καὶ πράγματι' (*Causid.* XX 49, *Justif.* 194 and *Consult.* IV 21) in the *Scala* (1.4 = 1.10 = 633B, 26.1 = 26.1 = 1013A, cf. 14.10 = 14.6 = 865A)<sup>1</sup>, and Climacus' adoption of Mark's vocabulary of the emergence of passion, constitute a clear indication of Climacus' familiarity with Mark's writings<sup>2</sup>. Bogdanovich notes some similarities of Climacus with Abba Isaiah<sup>3</sup>, e.g. the expression 'It is impossible to look at the sky with one eye and at the earth with the other', used by Climacus (3.23 = 3.32 668D), occurs in Abba Isaiah (*Ascet.* 15.1 also *Scala* 2.2 = 2.2 = 653D cf. *Ascet.* 15.1). He also believes that Climacus was influenced by Diadochus (*Cap. Gnost.* 37) in his

<sup>1</sup> To be fair, one must say that, before Climacus, the expression also occurs in Ephrem the Syrian (*De Humilitate*).

<sup>2</sup> Ware, T. *The Ascetic Writings of Mark the Hermit*. D.Phil. Thesis. Oxford, 1965. pp. 458-459.

<sup>3</sup> *Jovan.* pp. 156-157.

view of dreams<sup>1</sup>, while Couilleau finds a parallel between the 'natural' view of passion in Abba Isaiah and Climacus, and thinks that Climacus inherited from Diadochus his notion of 'educative desolation'<sup>2</sup>.

The possible influence of Climacus by Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, as well as by Dorotheos of Gaza, is a more complicated matter. Völker, pointing to the geographic closeness of Gaza and Sinai, claims to have found over a hundred passages in the *Scala*, similar to the Gaza fathers. He believes that all three of them, as well as Evagrius and Cassian, grew out of the *Apophthegmata* tradition<sup>3</sup>.

The principal difficulty is that very often similar issues are dealt with by monastic writers, such as Palladius, Diadochus, Dorotheos of Gaza and Climacus. At times, it is impossible to state clearly whether there is an adoption or simply a unity of tradition. In fact, answering a question where did Climacus borrow a particular phrase or is not so important by itself. What one should ask is why some notions became accepted as a part of the tradition, while others did not.

### ***The structure of the Scala and the dynamics of spiritual life***

The *Scala* consists of thirty chapters, or steps, each corresponding to a certain virtue or vice. Climacus was by no means the first author to present spiritual life as a sequence of stages. Origen in his *27th Homily on Numbers* identifies 42 stages in Exodus, which correspond to 42 generations preceding Christ's Incarnation and to 42 stages through which we are liberated from the devil and the desires of the flesh. Some of these stages are similar to those in the *Scala*, like detachment, exile, discernment, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Climaque.* col. 382.

<sup>3</sup> *Scala.* p. V, 7.

If we search for the origins of the ladder image, the most obvious source is, of course, Scripture. Climacus himself refers to the image of Jacob's ladder (9.1 = 9.1 = 840D, 30.36 = 30.18 = 1160C). Various other authors used the image of the ladder to describe spiritual life, such as Philo, Origen and the Syriac fathers<sup>1</sup>. One also must not forget Barsanuphius of Gaza (*Corr.* 160) and Gregory of Nyssa, who, commenting on the Beatitudes, saw them as the steps of a spiritual ladder (*De Beat.* II GNO VII,2. 89-90, *Ibid.* V GNO VII,2. 123-124). Climacus, however, was the first one to use this image so extensively as to present in it the entire picture of spiritual ascent.

What is the connection between the structure and the content of the book? How does the 'ladder' structure convey the Climacus' outlook of spiritual life?

There have been various attempts to analyze the structure of the book. K. Krumbacher divided the *Scala* into two parts: chapters I-XXIII, dealing with vices opposed to Christian life, and chapters XXIV-XXX, dealing with moral and theological virtues<sup>2</sup>. P. Deseille believes that the book consists of 3 parts: renunciation of the world (chapters 1-7), struggle against vices (chapters 8-23) and Christian perfection<sup>3</sup>. We think that the structure of the book can be seen as follows. Chapters 1-3 provide an introduction to monastic life. The introduction is followed by the main body of the book, beginning from chapter 4, dedicated to obedience, the cornerstone of monastic life, and ending with chapter 26, dedicated to discernment. In the end of the chapter on discernment Climacus, inserting two "spiritual alphabets", gives a summary of the preceding steps, thus

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<sup>1</sup> see Chrysavgis. *Ascent.* p.31 n.94, É. Bertaud and A. Rayez. *Échelle Spirituelle.* DS vol. 4 cols. 62-86. and T. Spidlik. *The Spirituality of the Christian East.* Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1986 (CS 79). p.69.

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte der byzantinische Litteratur*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Munich. 1897. pp. 143-144.

<sup>3</sup> Deseille, P. *La Dottrina Spirituale di Giovanni Climaco.* In: *Giovanni Climaco e il Sinai.* Edizioni Qiqajon. Comunità di Bose. 2002. pp. 103-104.

drawing to a logical conclusion the first part of the book. The last four chapters deal with Christian perfection. The concepts which he discusses belong to one and the same condition, of which they are different manifestations (e.g. 30.9 = 30.4 = 1156B). Thus, we think that the structure of the text suggests a twofold pattern of spiritual life.

In fact, the twofold division may be found not only in the structure of the text, but also in the text itself. The first stage is characterized by the intensive ascetic struggle and acquiring of basic virtues, while contemplative communion with God, of which only someone purified from passions is capable, characterizes the second stage. 'In the very beginning of or renunciation, it is certainly with labour and grief that we practise the virtues. But when we make progress in them, we no longer feel sorrow, or we feel little sorrow. But as soon our mortal mind is consumed, and mastered by our alacrity, we practise them with all joy and eagerness, with love and with divine fire' (1.16 = 1.29 = 637C)<sup>1</sup>. 'Offer to Christ the labours of your youth, and in your old age you will rejoice in the wealth of ἀπόθεια. What is gathered in youth nourishes and comforts those who are tired out in the old age' (1.24 = 1.43 = 641B). Climacus suggests that in the later stages the ascetic struggle grows less intensive, as one becomes less vulnerable to the temptations (28.63 = 28.61 = 1140BC, 29.2 = 29.1 = 1148B etc).

Climacus often uses the distinction between *πρᾶξις* (or *πρακτική*) and *θεωρία*, although he never clarifies it. For example, he sees the purpose of a spiritual guide (of whom Moses is the image) as to stand 'between *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία*, will raise the hands of prayer for us to God, so that guided by Him we

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<sup>1</sup> Cf *Apophthegmata Alph. Syncretica* 1.



may cross the sea of sin and rout the Amalek of the passions' (1.7 = 1.14 = 636A). Paraphrasing Ps. 55.6, Climacus writes: 'I will fly by *πρακτική*, and be at rest by *θεωρία* and humility' (4.1 = 4.1 = 677C). Ascetics 'pass from the strength of *πρακτική* to the strength of *θεωρία*' (26.153 = 26-2.48 = 1068B). 'Do not hasten to *θεωρία* when it is not time for *θεωρία*', Climacus warns (7.58 = 7.56 = 813C).

What were the sources of Climacus' twofold scheme? Origen is usually associated with the threefold scheme of *ἠθική*, *φυσική* and *ἐποπτική*, which he makes use of in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. This threefold theme was later to be adopted by Evagrius, in a form of *πρακτική*, *φυσική* and *θεολογία*. However, the simplified twofold *πρᾶξις* - *θεωρία* distinction may also be found in Origen<sup>1</sup>, who produces classical formulas: while *πρᾶξις* elevates to *θεωρία* (*Hom. in Luc.* 1. 9-10), *θεωρία* and *πρᾶξις* are inseparable (*Frag. in Luc. (in catenis)* 171). The distinction was later picked up by Gregory of Nazianzus (e.g. *Or.* 4.113) for whom they corresponded to the coenobitic and the solitary life respectively<sup>2</sup>, by Cassian, who viewed *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία* as consecutive stages<sup>3</sup>, and numerous other writers.

We may ask: does the *Scala* contain a coherent pattern of spiritual life, or was it intended to be a handbook, a "spiritual encyclopaedia", from which the readers were to learn about a particular vice or virtue?

The *Scala* is written in such a way that it shows different aspects of spiritual life in their interdependence. At the same time, when Climacus describes some particular virtue or vice, he usually gives a series of definitions,

<sup>1</sup> J. Lemaitre. *Contemplation chez les grecs et autres orientaux chrétiens*. DS. Vol.2 pt.2. col. 1802, Spidlik. *Spirituality*. p.334.

<sup>2</sup> R.R. Ruether. *Gregory of Nazianzus, Rhetor and Philosopher*. New York – Oxford, 1969. p.138.

<sup>3</sup> C. Stewart. *Cassian the Monk*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 50-51.

then showing its origins and means of acquiring it (if describing a virtue), or means of struggling with it (if describing a vice). So, the *Scala* may function as a directory in every particular situation.

The *Scala* also presents a coherent pattern of the spiritual life in general, which is consistent, if not always systematic. The structure of the *Scala* suggests gradual progress in spiritual life, in which the lower and the upper stages ought to be distinguished, although the image of the ladder must not be interpreted too literally. In Florovsky's expression, the structure of the book is 'defined more by the logic of the heart than by the logic of the mind'<sup>1</sup>. Climacus admits that he constructed his ladder 'as an unskilled architect' (27.30 = 27-2.2 = 1105B). He uses the image of ladder not in order to show the spiritual life as a sequence of strictly consecutive stages, although, as we have said, describing each step, Climacus shows its interdependence with the preceding and the following ones. Different steps represent different conditions of a human soul, which, although they ought to be distinguished from one another, may co-exist. By using the image and the structure of a ladder, Climacus wants to show his readers that the spiritual life as an ascent to God suggests gradual progress, and the entire ladder cannot be climbed instantly. We should not expect to achieve instantly virtues which entail a long period of work and inner struggle, seeking perfection prematurely (4.118 = 4.119 = 725B)<sup>2</sup>. 'To admire the labours of the saints is good; to emulate them wins salvation; but to wish suddenly to imitate their life in every point is unreasonable and impossible' (4.42 = 4.34 = 704C).

To God our spiritual achievements are not as important as the contrition of heart and persistence in love for God, which in themselves contain all virtues.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Florovsky. *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*. Vol. X of the Collected Works. Buchervertriebsanstalt. 1987. p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 160.

‘God gives His rewards not for abundance of gifts and labours, but for ardour of purpose’ (*Letter to John, Abbot of Raithou*). ‘When our soul leaves this world we shall not be blamed for not having worked miracles, or for not having been theologians or contemplatives (θεωρητικοί). But we shall certainly have to give an account to God of why we have not unceasingly mourned’ (7.70 = 7.73 = 816D). ‘An angel fell from heaven without any other passion except pride, and so we may ask whether it is possible to ascend to heaven by humility alone without any other of the virtues’ (23.12 = 22.12 = 968A). Those who have obtained humility have won the whole fight (26.49 = 26.29 = 1024B) because ‘God is manifested not in labours but in simplicity and humility’ (26.52 = 26.32 = 1024C). Climacus calls himself ‘a pauper and beggar as regards the virtues ... unlearned and stupid in word and deed ... still among the learners’ (*Letter to John, Abbot of Raithou*). He admits that he himself is sorely afflicted by insensitivity (18.5 = 17.5 = 933B).

It is important to realize that for Climacus salvation is achieved principally through the mercy and goodness of God rather than through one’s own efforts. He begins the *Scala* by describing the universal goodness of God (1.1 = 1.1 = 632), and, as His goodness transcends human achievements or failures, He is ‘the salvation of all’ (1.3 = 1.4 = 633A). ‘It is impossible for all to become dispassionate, but it is not impossible for all to be saved and reconciled to God’ (26.82 = 26.54 = 1029D). Climacus makes this point clear, in spite of reproving Origen, as the context suggests, for his views regarding *apokatastasis* (5.41 = 5.29 = 780D).

There are other ways to see that the image of ladder should not be interpreted too literally. For example, Climacus dedicates a separate chapter to

prayer towards the end of the *Scala*, but this does not mean that he does not expect his readers to pray at earlier stages. In fact, the whole of the *πρακτική* is a preparation for perfect prayer. If one is to become united with God in prayer, one has to get rid of everything that separates him from God and to conform himself to the one with Whom he is to be united with.

The pattern of spiritual struggle may be different even within one and the same day, according to its different periods (14.23 = 14.18 = 868A). Some of the temptations are to be fought with until one's last hour, such as gluttony (14.1 = 14.1 = 864C) and lust (14.10 = 14.6 = 865A). Climacus warns: 'What is achieved with great labour can be lost in an instant' (3.24 = 3.33 = 668D) and agrees with the *Apophthegmata*: 'Temptation is to be expected till the last breath' (Anthony 4 cf. *Scala* 4.93 = 4.89 = 716A). However, he admits the possibility of the gift of being free from struggle, even at early stages (4.55 = 4.48 = 708A, 4.59 = 4.52 = 708B).

Ascending the spiritual ladder is not a steady movement; there are ups and downs, caused both by one's own failures as well as by Divine Providence. 'Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously' (5.30 = 5.12 = 780A). 'It is the property of men to fall, and to rise again as often as this may happen' (4.31 = 4.27 = 696D). Likewise, Macarius of Egypt wrote: 'This is the mark of Christianity - however much a man toils, and however much righteousness he performs, to feel that he has done nothing ... and even if he is righteous before God, he should say, "I am not righteous, not I: I do not take pains, but only make a beginning every day' (*Coll. H* 26.11). In a more crystallized form, this idea may be found in the *Apophthegmata*: 'Abba Moses asked Abba Silvanus: "Can a man lay a new foundation every day?" The old man

said, "If he works hard, he can lay a new foundation at every moment' (*Alph. Silvanus* 12)<sup>1</sup>. What these sayings ultimately reflect is the assurance in human freedom, which can be recovered in spite of the human submission to sin.

Climacus speaks about the periods in one's life when God abandons the human soul not as a result of sins, but to increase man's love for Him. This theme is not as prominent in Climacus as in his contemporary Isaac the Syrian<sup>2</sup>, but Climacus indicates clearly that this is a part of the experience of human life in God. Using the expression 'providential abandonment' (ἐγκατάλειψις οικονομική), Climacus writes that 'in the case of falls which come to us by Divine providence, we acquire a sweet revulsion from them, because He who delivers us does not allow us to be held for long' (5.29 = 5.10 = 777C). Being painful, this experience nevertheless constitutes a part of life in God. 'As soon as a baby begins to recognize his father, it is all filled with joy. But if the father goes away, for a time on business and then comes home again, the child becomes full of joy and sorrow – joy at seeing the beloved, and sorrow at being deprived for so long of that fair beauty. And a mother sometimes hides herself from her child, and when she sees with what sorrow it seeks her, she is delighted: for thus she teaches it to be attached to her forever, and fans the flame of its love for her' (7.59 = 7.57-58 = 813CD). Diadochus uses almost the same image: when a mother finds her child rebellious over feeding, 'she pushes it away for a moment so that, being alarmed by the sight of some animals or rough-looking men, it will return crying with fright to her breast' (*Cap. Gnost.* 86). The purpose of this desolation, therefore, is 'to humble the soul's tendency to vanity

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Poemen* 85, 192.

<sup>2</sup> H. Alfeyev. *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2000 (CS 175). Ch.III.2

and self-glory, for the heart at once is filled with the fear of God, tears of thankfulness, and great longing for the beauty of ἡσυχία' (*Cap. Gnost.* 86, 87, cf. 69). Likewise, Macarius of Egypt speaks about the periods when 'grace retreats and clouds over, according as grace itself manages for the man's advantage' (*Coll. H* 8.5). 'The Lord knows the man's weakness, that he is easily lifted up. Therefore He withdraws, and permits the man to be exercised and put to trouble ... that you may be humble, and the more earnest in seeking God' (*Ibid.* 27.8). Cassian states that the reason of such providential abandonment is to test the steadfastness of our desire (*Conl.* IV.VI.3).

Finally, it is important to realize that the ladder does not have a last step. If the end of the journey is love, than 'we shall never cease to advance in it, either in the present or the future life, continually adding light to light' (26.153 = 26-2.38 = 1068B). The obvious inspiration behind this passage is Gregory of Nyssa, with his celebrated concept of ἐπέκτασις<sup>1</sup>. In the *Vita Mosis* Gregory wrote about Moses that 'once having set foot on the ladder which Jacob set up ... he continually climbed up the step above and never ceased to rise higher, because he always found a step higher than the one he had attained' (II.227). However, the notion of eternal progress is a commonplace in ascetic tradition. Macarius of Egypt describes 'the inner man' who 'like the king's son, ... is as bold as in the son of God as in a father, and doors are opened to him, and he enters within to many mansions (Jn. 14.2), and the further he goes on, doors are again opened in progression, a hundred mansion leading to a hundred beyond, and he is rich, and the richer he is, other new wonders are again disclosed to him, and he is

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<sup>1</sup> On this concept see R.E. Heine. *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*. Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975. pp. 63-114, P. Deseille. *Épectase*. DS. Vol. 4 pt. 1. cols. 785-788.

entrusted, as a son and an heir, with things that cannot be told by mankind or put into syllables by mouth and tongue' (*Coll. H* 8.6, cf. *Coll. B* 4.10.1). Macarius and Gregory do not simply speak about progress in moral virtues. As we shall see later on, it is love that makes the journey never-ending. Also, ἐπέκτασις is a way to reconcile the incomprehensibility of God with the belief that He can be known and experienced, but this is not something that Climacus discusses at length.

## **ANTHROPOLOGY**

### ***Introduction***

When we search the writings of the Fathers for their theology of the human being (in the narrow sense of the human person's makeup), we can easily see that hardly any of them intended to present such a theology<sup>1</sup>. The famous treatises of Nemesius of Emesa and Gregory of Nyssa are exceptions to the rule, and even they are not dedicated specifically to anthropology. Affirming the fullness of humanity of Christ, dogmatic writers needed to define this humanity in positive terms, speaking about, for example, the human body, the human soul or the human will. Thus, Christian anthropology was developing as an aspect of Christology.

An important aspect of patristic anthropology is that man was seen as a mystery: there is a sense of awe in the patristic vision of the human being. Basil the Great was reluctant to speak of the nature of man because 'the most difficult of all sciences is to know thyself' (*Hom. in Hex.* 9.6). Gregory of Nazianzus describes how he was once sitting in a grove, listening to the sound of the wind

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<sup>1</sup> See a helpful summary of the Early Fathers' anthropology in E. Osborn. *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.Ch. 4. and D.S. Wallace-Hadrill. *The Greek Patristic View of Nature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968. Chs. 2, 3.

in the tree branches, and to the birds and grasshoppers. With his feet in a cold stream, he thought to himself: 'Who was I? Who am I now? Who shall I be? ... I exist. Tell me: what does it mean? A part of me has vanished, another I am now, yet another I will be, if I will be at all.' (*Carm. Mor.* 14. 17, 25, 26). The human being poses more questions than answers: 'How we are mingled, and what is our movement, and how the mortal was compounded with the immortal, and how is it that I flow downwards, and yet am borne upwards, and how the soul is circumscribed; and how it gives life and shares in feelings; and how the mind is at once circumscribed and unlimited, abiding in us and yet travelling over the Universe in swift motion and flow; and how is it both received and imparted by word, and passes through air, and enters with all things; how it shares in sense, and enshrouds itself away from sense' (Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 28.22). The same attitude as to the entire human being prevented the Fathers from giving precise definitions to individual faculties. 'Let those who consider the nature of God to be within their comprehension<sup>1</sup>, whether they understand themselves – if they know the nature of their own mind' wrote Gregory of Nyssa (*De Op. Hom.* 11.2). For Gregory, it is precisely because *voûς* is the image of God, that its nature is as incomprehensible as that of God (*Ibid.* 11.4). Macarius of Egypt has a similar approach in his description of the human soul: 'Neither the wise by their wisdom nor the prudent by their prudence were able to comprehend the subtlety of the soul, or to speak of it as it is, but only those to whom through the Holy Ghost that comprehension is revealed, and the exact knowledge concerning the soul is declared' (*Coll. H.* 49.4)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory alludes to Eunomius and his followers.

<sup>2</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem *Cat.* 6.6, John Chrysostom *De Incomp.* 5. 259-284



When we look at the writings specifically dedicated to the spiritual life, the situation is particularly difficult. Few of spiritual writers present a systematic anthropology, although there are notable exceptions in this respect. For example, the teaching on the spiritual life of Origen or Evagrius cannot be appreciated outside of the context of their cosmology, which would define precisely the ontological significance of σῶμα or νοῦς<sup>1</sup>. It would be tempting for us to pose a question in an ontological fashion: what does Climacus actually *mean* when he says νοῦς or καρδιά? However, in Climacus and similar writers καρδιά or νοῦς cannot be defined, they can only be described, and that description is possible only with regards to their activities. Later writers (including Climacus) used the anthropological vocabulary simply to convey certain truths about spiritual life.

For example, when Climacus speaks about ‘contrition of soul’ and ‘contrition of heart’, or ‘hardness of soul’ and ‘hardness of heart’ we have no reason to think that he speaks about different realities. In some passages it is particularly clear that ‘heart’ and ‘soul’ are being used as synonyms:

‘In the hearts of the proud, blasphemous words will find birth; but in the souls of the humble, heavenly visions’ (23.33 = 22.26 = 969 B). ‘In the hearts of the meek the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is a seat of the devil’ (24.7 = 24.3 = 981A).

Similar passages may be found in relation to νοῦς and ψυχή:

‘A vigilant eye makes the mind pure; but much sleep hardens the soul’ (20.3 = 19.2 = 940 D). ‘A meek soul is a throne of simplicity, but an angry mind

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<sup>1</sup> The anthropology of Origen and Evagrius was different in a number of ways. M. O’Laughlin. *Elements of Fourth Century Origenism: The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources*. In: *Origen of Alexandria. His Work and His Legacy*. Ed. by C. Kannengieser and W. Peterson. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press. 1988. pp. 357-373

is a creator of evil' (24.9 = 24.4 = 981A). 'The souls of the meek are filled with knowledge, but an angry mind is a denizen of darkness and ignorance' (24.12 = 24.4 = 981 B).

Again, when Climacus speaks about the eye of the heart (8.19 = 8.22 = 832 CD, 23.26 = 22.22 = 969A, 26.189 = 26-2.70 = 1076 A), the eye of the soul (3.17 = 3.24 = 668 B, 7.42 = 7.42 = 809 A, 23.22 = 22.22 = 969 A, 26.100 = 26.72 = 1033 C, 27.80 = 27-2.50, *Ad Past.* 12 = 1169 A), the eye of the διάνοια (*Letter to John, Abbot of Raithu* 628 A), or the eye of νοῦς (4.21 = 4.19 = 688 C), we have no reasons to think that he speaks about different anthropological realities, but rather about the same capacity of inner vision.

Thus, the *Scala* is not an anthropological treatise, and Climacus does not attempt to present an entirely consistent anthropology. It would therefore be unfair to accuse him of this, and it would be wrong to claim that he does. However, analysing Climacus' anthropological vocabulary may help to understand various issues of his theology.

In this chapter we are going to analyse Climacus' anthropological vocabulary, particularly regarding the concepts of νοῦς and καρδιά, which have a special significance not only for Climacus, but also for patristic anthropology in general. How consistent is Climacus in his νοῦς – καρδιά distinction? How is he indebted to his predecessors in his anthropological vocabulary? How does his anthropology clarify his understanding of the dynamics of spiritual life in general? How does he see the role of the human body in this development?

Climacus adopts the traditional trichotomic vision of the human person as body (σῶμα), soul (ψυχή) and spirit (πνεῦμα) (*Ad Past.* 100 = 1205B). He

spells out this division clearly only twice (also in 28.61 = 28.59 = 1140B), in the first passage adopting the classical platonic division of the human soul into three parts – the appetitive (πάθος), the irascible (θυμός), and the rational (λογικός)<sup>1</sup>. However, he does not follow any of these divisions consistently throughout the book.

### *Free will*

For Climacus freedom is as an essential characteristic of all rational beings. By introducing the principle of free will (αὐτεξούσια (1.1 = 1.1 = 632A) or προαίρεσις (1.3 = 1.4 = 633A)) at the beginning of the book, Climacus establishes it as a foundation of the spiritual life<sup>2</sup>. Since for Climacus the monastic struggle is primarily an inner struggle with λογισμοί within one's heart, he introduces the famous six-fold scheme of the formation of a passion: assault (προσβολή), converse (συνδυασμός), consent (συγκατάθεσις), captivity (αἰχμαλωσία), struggle (πάλη) and passion (πάθος) (15.74 = 15.73 = 896C – 897B) - a scheme, in which the four middle stages represent the gradual consent of the free will to passion and sin, and which we shall discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

Mark the Monk also distinguishes between a guiltless 'provocation' (προσβολή), which is 'an image-free stimulation in the heart' (*Leg.* 141) and our acceptance (συγκατάθεσις), characterized by thoughts, already accompanied by images (*Ibid.* 142 See also *Nic.* I. 23-30). He also emphasizes the importance of

<sup>1</sup> Also a traditional division, although sometimes different terms are used: see Clement of Alexandria *Paed.* 3.1, Gregory of Nyssa *De Op. Hom.* 8.4, Nemesis of Emesa *De Nat. Hom.* 15-17, Evagrius *Prakt.* 89. Origen is hesitant to accept it (*De Prin.* 3.4.1)

<sup>2</sup> The exception to this are 'unmentionable blasphemous thoughts' in regards to which Climacus makes quite clear that it is not the person himself who pronounces them but the demons (23.41 = 23.4 = 976D). Probably another exception is the 'flick of mind', when passion is introduced to the soul instantly, without consent (ἄσυνδυάστῳ) (15.75 = 15.73 = 897B), which signifies free acceptance.

‘prepossession’ (πρόληψις), which is ‘the involuntary presence of the former sins in the memory’ (*Ibid.* 140)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, he distinguishes between the ‘voluntary sin of the mind’ (ἐκούσιον κακία τῆς διανοίας) or passion ‘due to free choice’ (κατὰ πρόθεσιν), from our free will (ἐκ τοῦ αὐτεξουσίου θελήματος) and those resulting from prepossession’ (*Leg.* 139,152, *Justif.* 178). Diadochus has a similar outlook. While Climacus insists on the necessity of guarding the heart from the λογισμοὶ inspired by demons, which are external to the personality, according to Diadochus ‘the heart produces good and bad thoughts from itself (ἐξ ἑαυτῆς). But it does this not because it is the heart’s nature to produce evil ideas, but because as a result of the primal deception the remembrance of evil has become as it were a habit (ἔξις)’. However, he admits that most of these λογισμοί are the results of demonic attacks (*Cap. Gnost.* 83). Climacus also uses the term πρόληψις (4.73 = 4.68 = 712A, 5.29 = 5.9 = 777C, 8.11 = 8.13 = 829B, 18.2 = 17.2 = 932B, 26.7 = 26.7 = 1013 C, 26.38 = 26.28 = 1021 B, 26.93 = 26.65 = 1033 B, 26.s15 = 26-3.6 = 1085A), but, in fact, he does not attach to it any meaning more specific than ‘bad habit’. The closest he comes to Mark is probably 26.s26 = 26-3.17 = 1085 D: ‘As steel is attracted to the magnet even against its will, for it is drawn by an inexplicable force of nature, so he who has contracted sinful habits (ταῖς προλήψεσιν) is tyrannized by them.’ He does not ascribe to πρόληψις any definite role in formation of a passion. The difference between Diadochus and Mark on the one hand and Climacus on the other is significant: for Climacus the origin of sin at every occasion involves the free consent of man.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of πρόληψις in Mark the monk see Ware. *Mark.* pp. 274-280.

In the *Scala* free will signifies not an anthropological faculty, but the freedom to choose between good and evil – a choice, which is fundamental to the Christian vision of man. It is this constant necessity of choice, which is characteristic of the human situation. ‘It is the property of angels ... not to fall, and even, as some say, it is quite impossible for them to fall. It is the property of men to fall, and to rise again as often as this may happen. But it is the property of devils, and devils alone, not to rise once they have fallen’ (4.31 = 4.27 = 696D). It is through this exercise of will towards God that the proper state of human faculties is restored. However, Climacus himself is aware of the difficulty of choosing the good. ‘No one really wants to sin against God, even though we all sin without being forced to’ (10.5 = 10.5 = 845D). Later on, he raises this problem again. ‘One thing that astonishes me very much: why do we so quickly and easily incline to the passions, when we have Almighty God, angels and saints, to help us towards the virtues, and only the wicked demon against us? I do not wish to speak about this in more detail; in fact, I cannot’ (26.134 = 26-2.18 = 1061D – 1064A). Most likely Climacus owes his ambiguity to Apostle Paul, who is more explicit in his anatomy of sin: ‘I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but the sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me ... For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members’ (Rom. 7. 15-23).

The ascetic tradition preserved in its memory the words of the Saviour 'Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin' (Jn. 8.34). The free will is only free when it chooses what is good, but when it chooses evil, it becomes paralyzed. According to Mark the Monk, freedom may be retained only by fulfilling the commandments (*Bapt.* I. 18), which safeguard the boundaries of freedom we are given (*Ibid.* III. 45-46). Thus, the ascetic ideal of choosing the good by way of abstaining from sin and passions signifies the recovery of the true freedom. In the present situation the entire human being is subjected to passions, and therefore the exercise of free will is a difficult task. Even conscience, which is 'an incorruptible judge' (12.7 = 12.5 = 856 B), may be silent simply because it is 'immersed in evil' (5.37 = 5.21 = 780 B).

Thus, Climacus usually talks about the will in negative terms, speaking about the 'cutting off of one's will' (ἐκκοπή θελημάτων) (e.g. 2.8 = 2.13 = 657A, 2.9 = 2.14 = 65 A), slaying one's will (4.2 = 4.2 = 677D), renunciation of will (ἐγκατάλειψις θελήματος) (6.6 = 6.8 = 793C), or about mortification of will (e.g. 4.44 = 4.37 = 704D, 26.111 = 26-2.2 = 1057B). By all these terms Climacus means nothing else but complete obedience to one's spiritual father. As Isidore said to his abbot on his coming to the monastery<sup>1</sup>, 'As iron to the smith, so I surrender myself in submission to you, holy father' (4.23 = 4.21 = 689A). As

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<sup>1</sup> In chs. 4 and 5 Climacus describes his visit to a certain monastery, as well as his conversations with the abbot and the monks, but does not identify this monastery, of which the famous Prison was a dependence. Neither does Climacus give the name of the abbot, whom he calls 'light of lights' (5.3 = 5.5 = 764D), V. Lurie notes that his name is the only one which Climacus omits. It is only the closeness of Alexandria which is alluded to (4.31 = 4.26 = 696B). V. Lurie believes that Climacus was silent only because the monastery must have had *damnatio memoriae* in his times. Thus, he believes that the monastery described is the monastery of Monidia, mentioned by John Moschus (*Pratum* 151, 152, 178). It is known to have balanced between monophysiticism and orthodoxy, and it is also known to have accepted monothelitism, which is why Climacus hesitated to identify it. В.М. Лурье. *Из истории чинопоследований псалмопения: полная псалтирь в ежедневном правиле (в связи с историей египетского монашества IV—VII вв.)*. *Византийский временник*. 1997 [1999]. 58 (83) pp. 82-83. This explanation suggests a later date of Climacus' life. It is also unclear why did Climacus hold such a high opinion of the monastery, in spite of his insistence on orthodoxy in dogmatic issues.

the present state of domination by passions makes the exercise of free will towards God difficult, attaining to freedom by following the will of God can only be practiced by submitting it to a guide capable of discernment.

### *Noûs and καρδιά*

The two terms, which Climacus usually employs to describe the inner life are νοûς and καρδιά. While the notion of mind is more specific and philosophical, the notion of heart is biblical and, as such, conveys the whole variety of meanings and overtones. For example, when Climacus speaks about the 'sighs of the heart' (3.15 = 3.19 = 665D), sorrowful heart (7.45 = 7.45 = 809C) or contrite heart (21.9 = 20.8 = 945D, etc) we should not attach any anthropological significance to these and similar passages – Climacus is simply using the language of the Scripture, especially of the Psalms (cf. Ps. 37.9, 12.3, 93.19, 50.19).

For Climacus the heart may signify the entire human person. His scriptural interpretation is noteworthy: 'I have cried with my whole heart, says the Psalmist<sup>1</sup>, that is, with body, soul and spirit' (28.61 = 28.59 = 1140 B). Thus, control over the heart signifies over the entire human being, including the body: 'Be like a king in your heart, seated high in humility, and commanding laughter: Go, and it goes; and sweet weeping; come, and it comes; and our tyrant and slave, the body: Do this, and it does it.'<sup>2</sup> (7.39 = 7.40 = 808D – 809A).

The heart often signifies the general disposition of man and it can be in any state between 'like a stone'<sup>3</sup> to angelic (4.87 = 4.82 = 713 BC). Climacus speaks

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<sup>1</sup> Ps 118.145.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt 8.9.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps an allusion to Ez 11.19, 36.26.

about the heart, which may be sorrowful or joyful (7.43 = 7.35 = 704 C), ‘heavy and unclean’ (10.2 = 10.1 = 845 C) or ‘pure and humble’ (*Letter to John, Abbot of Raithu*). Like the entire human being, the heart is dominated by sin and evil. Climacus speaks about the heart being ‘unfeeling’ (1.8 = 1.16 = 636B), he likes to use the word the scriptural ‘σκληροκαρδία’ to illustrate the insensitivity of the human heart (26.46 = 26.29 = 1024A, 27.41 = 27-2.8 = 1108D)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the heart can also be in a state of fierceness (ἀγριότης), insensibility (ἀναισθησία) and hardness (πώρωσις) at the same time. (4.88 = 4.83 = 713C).

Noûς is more connected with reasoning and thinking. In classical thought νοῦς is the organ of the soul, or aspect of the soul, that knows, or is capable of knowledge. For Plato νοῦς perceives the realm of intelligible reality – that of the forms. The notion was further developed by Aristotle and Neo-platonism. It is the cognitive aspect of νοῦς, which is the heart of the Platonic notion, that is preserved in Climacus. However, the refinements of later thinkers are not much reflected in the *Scala*.

When Climacus asked Isidore about the occupation (ἐργασία) of his mind during seven years of sitting by the gates of the monastery, all he was asking was what Isidore had thought about (4.24 = 4.22 = 689C). The ἐργασία of mind during psalmody should be the meditation (θεωρία) of the words sung (19.6 = 18.5 = 937D). The activity of the mind signifies that one is alive (5.22 = 5.5 = 772C). Climacus lists the activities (ἐργασίαι) of an active mind (τοῦ πρακτικοῦ νοῦς): ‘meditation (ἔννοια) on loving God, on the remembrance (μνήμη) of God, on the remembrance of the kingdom, on the

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that once Climacus uses this notion in a positive sense, presumably meaning persistence of disposition (26.87 = 26.59 = 1032B). Cf. ‘Eat straw, wear straw, sleep on straw: that is to say, despise everything and acquire for yourself a heart of iron’ (*Apophthegmata Alph. Euprepius* 4).



remembrance of the holy martyrs, on the remembrance of God himself present ... on remembrance of the holy and spiritual powers, on the remembrance of one's departure, judgment, sentence and punishment<sup>1</sup>. We began with the sublime, but have ended with things that never fail.'(6.15 = 6.17 = 796BC). Typically, Climacus uses μνήμη not only in the meaning of recollection of past events, but also as awareness of God, or of events to come, in the same meaning as in the Eucharistic ἀνάμνησις. Thus, the function of νοῦς as the seat of memory is ontological rather than psychological.

However, Climacus did not have in his mind a clear distinction between 'emotional heart' and 'discursive mind'. Νοῦς can be angry (ὀργίλος) (24.9 = 24.4 = 981A), in the state of compunction (κατάνυξις) (7.68), in 'the abyss of humility' (5.10 = 5.5 = 765 C) or in 'the depths of despair' (26.15 = 26.13 = 1016 D), it can also be 'charitable and sensible (εὐγνώμων καὶ ἐχέφρων)' (10.16 = 10.17 = 848D). The role of mind in Climacus' understanding of πένθος is noteworthy. While πένθος is defined as 'sadness of soul and the disposition of the sorrowing heart' (σκυθρωπότης ψυχῆς, ἐνωδύνου καρδίας διάθεσις) (7.1 = 7.1 = 801C), it is not merely an emotional state without any rational foundation and participation of νοῦς. 'When they weep, some force themselves unseasonably to think of nothing at all during this blessed time, not realizing that tears without thought are proper only to an irrational nature and not to a rational one. Tears are a product of thought, and the father of thought is rational mind (δάκρυον' ανέννοιον ἀλόγου φύσεως ἴδιον, καὶ οὐ λογικῆς γέννημα ἐννοιῶν, δάκρυον πατήρ δὲ ἐννοίας, λογικός νοῦς) (7.17 = 7.20 = 805A).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Diadochus. *Cap. Gnost.* 18.

The significance of the heart is that it is the centre of the ascetic struggle with the λογισμοί (e.g. 4.32 = 4.27 = 697A, 15.78-79 = 15.76 = 900A, 15.87 = 15.82 = 901C, 23.37 = 22.28 = 969C, 23.47 = 23.9 = 977C). Climacus speaks about the ‘depth of heart’ (βάθος τῆς καρδίας), where a λογισμός is concealed (15.79 = 15.76 = 900A). He develops the traditional theme of ‘custody of heart’<sup>1</sup>, speaking about the ‘doors of the heart’, which should be guarded against evil λογισμοί (27.3 = 27.2 = 1097B, cf. 27.18 = 27.17 = 1100A)<sup>2</sup>, calling to place strict and unsleeping guards at the gate of the heart (4.36 = 4.31 = 700C). The ascetic perspective of heart becomes especially apparent when Climacus introduces the sevenfold scheme of the origination of passion, which we have already mentioned.

Climacus uses similar language with regard to mind. He speaks about ‘guarding of mind (νοὸς φυλακὴ)’ (6.4 = 6.6 = 793C, 14.33 = 14.31 = 869A). One has to be a ‘master of mind’ (28.31 = 28.36 = 1136B), in order to liberate the mind, which is in a state of captivity (αἰχμαλωσία) (28.15 = 28.14 = 1132C, cf. 28.62 = 28.60 = 1140B). Although Climacus admits that instability is natural to the mind (ἴδιον γὰρ τοῦ νοὸς τὸ ἄστατον) (28.17 = 28.16 = 1132C), he urges to constant training of νοὸς not to wander (28.21 = 28.22 = 1133A): ‘Be concentrated without self-display, withdrawn into your heart’ (Γίνου σύννους, ἀφιλένδεικτος, πρὸς τὴν σεαυτοῦ καρδίαν

<sup>1</sup> See P. Adnès. *Garde du coeur dans la spiritualité orientale*. DS vol. 6. cols. 102–117, esp. cols. 102–110, A. Guillaumont. *Le “Coeur” chez les spirituels grecs à l’époque ancienne*. 4. *La garde du coeur*. DS vol.2 pt. 2. cols. 2385–2287.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Be the door-keeper of your heart. And so that no alien may enter therein, say: “Are you on our side or the adversary’s?”’ John Moschus. *Pratum*. 110. Cf. Macarius. *Coll. H*. 31.6. This image is used in several apophthegms. See Adnès. *Garde du coeur*. pp. 105–106.

ἐξεστηκώς) (7.15 = 7.18 = 805A)<sup>1</sup>. ‘Restrain your unrestrainable mind within your active body ... Fix your mind to your soul as to the wood of the cross’<sup>2</sup>, as Climacus was exhorted by an older monk (4.36 = 4.31 = 700C). ‘Constantly wrestle with your thought (ἐννοία), and whenever it wanders call it back to you ... unceasingly recall your mind (νοῦς)’ (4.92 = 4.88 = 713D). While concentration may be achieved through reading, which helps νοῦς to concentrate (27.78 = 27.2.47 = 116C), νοῦς can be distracted when searching for words in prayer’ (28.10 = 28.9 = 1132B).

The mind is the chief anthropological faculty of man; it is the ἀρχιερεὺς (28.51 = 28.52 = 1137B), to which all the senses must be submitted (29.3 = 29.2 = 1148B). The eye of the mind (τὸ τοῦ νοῦς ὄμμα) of a righteous person is said to keep a ‘vigorous and strict watch for demons and passion’ (4.21 = 4.19 = 688C). We need to make our mind, which is a ‘greedy kitchen dog addicted to barking, a lover of chastity and watchfulness (φιλεπίσκοπος)’ (1.8 = 1.17 = 636B). In fact, the image of the kitchen dog, which Climacus uses to illustrate the fallen state of mind, also conveys its proper function of guarding, which is to be restored. Thus, Climacus brings in the image of the dog once again in *Ad Pastorem* 9 = 1168 B: ‘When darkness and the night of passions overtake the flock, make your dog immovable in watching. There is nothing improper in calling your mind a dog, for it drives away the wild beasts.’

Climacus distinguishes between different stages of the inner self-control. ‘The guarding of thoughts (φυλακὴ λογισμῶν) is one thing, and the custody of mind (τήρησις νοῦς) is another. As far as the East is from the West, so much

<sup>1</sup> See the notion of concentration *within* the heart also in Diadochus *Cap. Gnost.* 57.

<sup>2</sup> A similar image of the crucifixion of mind on the cross also appears in Abba Isaiah *Ascet.* 16.4, 22.5.

higher is the latter from the former; and it is more laborious' (26.78 = 26.50 = 1029B). 'It is one thing to keep watch (ἐπισκοπεῖν) over the heart, and another to keep watch over the heart by means of the mind, that ruler and high-priest (ἀρχιερεὺς) that offers spiritual sacrifices to Christ' (28.51 = 28.52 = 1137B). What is the difference between the two? Apparently Climacus distinguishes between the different states – that of active struggle with demons and that of not being vulnerable to their attacks, therefore, not being defiled by them.

'It is one thing to pray for the deliverance from bad thoughts, another to contradict them another to despise and disregard them ... He who stands on the middle step will often make use of the first of these means through being taken unawares. But he who stands on the first step is not in a position to ward off his enemies by the second means. And he who has reached the third step spurns the demons altogether' (26.79 = 26.51 = 1029BC).

'As the winds in calm weather ruffle only the surface of the sea, but at other times they stir the depths as well, so you can imagine to yourself the dark winds of iniquity. For in those enslaved by passions, they shake the actual consciousness of the heart (τὴν τῆς καρδίας αἴσθησιν), but in those who have already made progress they only ruffle the surface of the mind (τὴν ἐπιπολήν τοῦ νοῦ). That is why the latter soon feel their normal calm, for the heart was left undefiled' (26.187 = 26-2.69 = 1073D – 1076A)<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, Climacus distinguishes between the custody of the heart (=guarding of thoughts) and guarding of mind as two distinctive stages of spiritual progress – a distinction, which earlier authors do not make<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It seems to us that Climacus is clear by what he means by τήρησις νοός, contrary to Adnès' opinion. *Garde du coeur*. p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John of Gaza: 'To guard the heart means to keep sober and pure the intellect' (*Corr.* 166).

Control over mind signifies control over senses and emotions, and when senses are controlled, they are also transfigured. 'A noetic mind (νοῦς νοερός)<sup>1</sup> is certainly wrapped in noetic perception (νοεράν αἰσθεσιν), and whether it is in us or not in us, let us never cease to seek it. When it makes its appearance, the outward perceptions of their own accord cease their natural action (τὰ οἰκεῖα ἐνεργεῖν οἰκεῖως παυθήσονται)' (26.22 = 26.17 = 1020A). The term αἰσθησις νοερά (which Climacus uses only twice, in another case to describe the capacity to discern what is good and what is of nature and what is opposed to it (26.1 = 26.1 = 1013A)) deserves an excursus of its own. It emerges in the Macarian homilies, where the usage of the term αἰσθησις as a faculty of intellectual or spiritual perception is very similar to Origen's doctrine of the spiritual senses, as has been pointed out by C. Stewart<sup>2</sup>. The author of the homilies associates it with discernment, with the help of which a soul is able to distinguish between the νοερόν φῶς of God and the false light of Satan (*Coll. B* 2.10.5) (as does Diadochus: *Cap. Gnost.* 30-31). Macarius also uses the term to complement γνῶσις, ἐπίγνωσις and ἀποκάλυψις<sup>3</sup>, because the distinction between the meaning of αἰσθησις as 'faculty of perception' and 'state or condition' is usually vague<sup>4</sup>, therefore 'recognition, perception, knowledge experience are inseparable'<sup>5</sup>. Diadochus, in his turn, describes αἰσθησις νοερά (synonymous to αἰσθησις τῆς καρδίας, αἰσθησις τῆς ψυχῆς, αἰσθησις

<sup>1</sup> In 26.113 = 26.2-3 = 1057D Climacus also describes God as νοῦς νοερός – an expression, favoured by Neo-Platonist philosophers: (Proclus. *Theol. Plat.* 3.75.8,16; 5.41.14; 5.50.12,17, *In Plat. Tim.* 3.101.18; 3.102.4, Hermias. *In Plat. Phaedr. Schol.* 117.1, Damascius *De Princ.* 295.8, *In Parm.* 117.13). Apparently, Climacus emphasises the purely spiritual nature of God.

<sup>2</sup> C. Stewart. *Working the Earth of the Heart: the Messalian Controversy in History, Text and Language to AD 431*. Oxford: Clarendon press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. p. 124. With regard to 'spiritual senses' Climacus' modification of Mt. 11.15 is noteworthy: 'he who has mind (νοῦς) to hear, let him hear' (15.28).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.126-128

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.129.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.130.

τοῦ πνεύματος etc.) as the single spiritual sense, dissipated into five as a result of the Fall<sup>1</sup>. It is interesting that for Diadochus αἴσθησις τοῦ πνεύματος is a mode of perceiving not only the Divine realities, but also of other human beings, thus transcending 'friendship after the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα φιλία)' (*Cap. Gnost.* 15).

Climacus does not give a specific meaning of the term αἴσθησις νοερὰ, and it is therefore difficult to evaluate his inspiration by Diadochus or Macarius in this respect. It is therefore unclear whether αἴσθησις νοερὰ is synonymous with αἴσθησις τῆς καρδίας (4.38 = 4.32 = 701C, 6.16 = 6.18 = 796C, 7.28 = 7.31 = 808B, 19.3 = 18.4 = 937C, 25.31 = 25.30 = 996B, 26.23 = 26.18 = 1020B, 27.3 = 27.2 = 1097B), or αἴσθησις τῆς ψυχῆς (26.564 = 26-3.55 = 1092A, 27.66 = 27-2.31 = 1113A). It is clear, however, that in the above-mentioned passage Climacus is speaking about a different level of perception of reality through the transformation of the senses. This is suggested by another passage: 'He who has perfectly united his senses to God is mystically led by Him to an understanding of His words (Ὁ Θεὸς τελείως τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἐνώσας τοὺς λόγους αὐτοῦ μυσταγωγεῖται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ)' (30.21 = 30.12 = 1157 C). It is possible that by being mystically enlightened about λόγοι Climacus means not only the words in the narrow sense, but, like Maximus the Confessor<sup>2</sup>, a form of contemplation of the created order.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. pp. 137-138, A. Louth. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981. p. 128, N. Madden. Αἴσθησις νοερὰ (Diadochus-Maximus). SP 23, 1989. pp. 53-60.

<sup>2</sup> С.Л.Епифанович. Преподобный Максим Исповедник и византийское богословие. Москва, "Мартис", 1996. pp. 64-68, 129-131, L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*. Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 1995. pp. 72-80, J. van Rossum. *The λόγοι of creation and the Divine 'energies in Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas*. SP 27, 1993. pp. 213-217. For the history of the term and various views on λόγοι see esp. Епифанович. *Op. cit.* pp. 65-66.

One of the Climacus' favourite images for the life of the heart is that of flame, (e.g. 7.2 = 7.3 = 801D, 8.5 = 8.6 = 823B). When we look at the passages from the *Scala*, which are concerned with the experience of fire and light, we must remember, that for Climacus 'one and the same fire is called both the fire which consumes and the light which illumines'<sup>1</sup> (28.51 = 28.52 = 1137C). He also uses the image of fire to describe both the demonic temptations and the Divine enlightenment. A monk's heart can be inflamed by demons with memories of his relatives, while he must quench this 'untimely fire of heart' by inflaming it with the memory of eternal fire (2.10 = 2.16 = 657B).

When Climacus speaks about the Divine illumination, his language usually implies that it take place in the heart (e.g. 4.85 = 4.79 = 713B, 5.22 = 5.5 = 772D, 23.26 = 22.22 = 969A) stressing that illumination is dependent on the purity of heart. (4.85 = 4.79 = 713B, 7.55 = 7.53 = 813B). However, addressing John, abbot of Raithou, Climacus writes: 'the eye of your διόνοια is pure and free from everything earthly and from the dark overclouding of the passions, so that it turns unhindered to the Divine light and is illumined by it'. Although Climacus does not adopt the Macarian definition of νοῦς as the 'eye of the soul' (*Coll. H* 7.8), for him the Divine light is perceived by νοῦς. It is νοῦς which beholds God (26.34 = 26.25 = 1021A), and which in light is brought ineffably and unspeakably to Christ in ecstasy (26.142 = 26-2.27 = 1065A).

Some earlier authors, such as Evagrius (*Prakt.* 64) or Diadochus (*Cap. Gnost.* 40, in 69 νοῦς synonymous with soul) use the language of νοῦς seeing its own light. Although Climacus does not make clear whether the light is Divine or is of νοῦς itself, it is suggested that the soul is capable of seeing light inasmuch

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<sup>1</sup> Heb 12.29, Jn 1.9.

as it possesses light in itself: 'the eye of the soul is extremely beautiful and, next after the incorporeal beings, it surpasses all things' (26.100 = 26.72 = 1033C).

The notion of heart is also important for appreciating Climacus' understanding of prayer. Climacus speaks about the 'true prayer of the heart (προσευχὴ καρδίας ἀληθῆ)', meaning a prayer which is not expressed outwardly or verbally<sup>1</sup> (15.81 = 15.76 = 900C) As on this occasion Climacus abandons the all-embracing meaning of 'heart', which includes the body, we may suggest that this 'true prayer of the heart' is the same as the 'true prayer of mind' which is superior to vocal prayer and the prayer of those who live in the world respectively (27.21 = 27.20 = 1100AB) and probably the same as inner prayer which is impossible to retain during chanting with many (19.6 = 18.5 = 937D).

Although using the term νοῦς also enables Climacus to describe pure prayer, which consists in presenting to God a 'pure mind' (27.53 = 27-2.19 = 1112A), it is interesting that for Climacus prayer is not exclusively the activity of νοῦς as it is for Evagrius (*De Or.* 3, 35). As a certain monk, who was praying with more 'heartfelt feeling' (αἴσθησις καρδίας) than others had told to Climacus, 'I have the habit, father John, at the very beginning, of collecting my thoughts (τοὺς λογισμοὺς), my mind and my soul, and summoning them I cry to them: O come let us worship and fall down before Christ, Our king and our God' (4.38 = 4.32 = 701C). Perhaps Climacus stresses the all-embracing nature of prayer rather than gives it anthropological foundation.

As we can see, in spite of not being always precise in his usage of καρδία or νοῦς, Climacus does not always use them as synonyms. How do they

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Diadochus opposes bodily prayer to prayer ἐν μόνῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ (*Cap. Gnost.* 73). Cf. Macarius *Coll. H.* 6.1.



relate to each other? This is how Climacus uses the image of the resurrection of Lazarus to illustrate the attainment of ἀπάθεια: Christ rolls away the stone of hardness from heart, and looses Lazarus, that is, νοῦς (1.6 = 1.13 = 633D)<sup>1</sup>. Climacus also gives the definition of ἀπάθεια as ‘heaven of the mind within the heart’ (ἐγκάρδιον νοῦς οὐρανόν) (29.2 = 2.1 = 1148B). In these only two passages which treat heart and mind in their interdependence Climacus clearly sees καρδιά as external to νοῦς.

What is the significance of Climacus’ understanding of heart? As we shall see, Climacus suggests making use of the full potential of the emotional life of man. The problem is that man is sensitive towards things, which he should not be sensitive to, being attached to earthly things and dependent upon the opinions of other people. At the same time, his heart is insensitive and hard towards God. When one makes an effort to draw nearer to God, this situation changes: the Divine love touches the heart (*Ad Past.* 34 = 1184A) and pierces it as with a sword (5.26 = 5.5 = 776D).

The analysis of Climacus’s usage of the word ‘heart’ helps us to appreciate the main message of the *Scala* – that the aim of the spiritual life is not the suppression of our emotional life, but simply putting things in their right places by attaining the proper relationship with God. In the words of Abba Isaiah, ‘our hardness of heart is making us blind: for we follow the desires of our heart and prefer them to God. We love our passions, not Him’ (*Ascet.* 5.6).

The significance of the heart as the integrity of the human person not excluding the body is striking. Climacus may have been inspired by Macarius who had a similar view of καρδιά: ‘The heart governs and reigns over the whole

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<sup>1</sup> The image of Lazarus as resurrected νοῦς also appears in Abba Isaiah *Ascet.* 23.10.

bodily organism; and when grace possesses the ranges of the heart, it reigns over all the members and the thoughts. For there, in the heart, is the mind, and all the faculties of the soul, and its expectation; therefore grace penetrates also to all the members of the body' (*Coll. H* 15.20). Interestingly, Climacus uses the image of 'the earth of the heart' (ἡ γῆ τῆς καρδίας) (25.8 = 25.9 = 992B. cf. 8.8 = 8.10 = 829 A), identical to that of Macarius (*Coll. B* 6.3.6, 7.1.1, 7.9.2, 11.2.1, *Coll. H* 26.21, 47.6).

At the same time νοῦς signifies the chief faculty or capacity of the human being, which is particularly prominent in inner self-control and the experience of light. It may be tempting to limit the concept of νοῦς to Evagrian influences. However, as it has been pointed out by M. Plested, 'the νοῦς is quite as much at home in Macarian as in Evagrian spirituality'<sup>1</sup>.

### **Body**

J. Meyendorff insists that the extreme forms of asceticism, which Climacus required from his readers, certainly denote Origenist spirituality<sup>2</sup>. Is Climacus' view of the body essentially negative? What is its role in the spiritual ascent?

At the first glance, Climacus' attitude to body, which he calls 'wretched (δύστηνος)' (1.7 = 1.15 = 636A), is essentially negative. Someone who loves God hates it (2.1 = 2.1 = 653C). The monks in the Prison exhorted each other, saying: 'Let us run, and not spare this our foul and wicked flesh, but let us kill it as it killed us' (5.18 = 5.5 = 769D). Climacus says: 'Throughout your life, do not trust your body, and do not rely on it until you stand before Christ' (15.17 =

<sup>1</sup> *Macarius and Diadochus: An Essay in Comparison*. SP 30, 1997. p. 236. E.g. 'The heart has a captain in the mind (νοῦς), the conscience ... and it is the mind and conscience which chides and guides the heart' (*Coll. H* 15.33-34).

<sup>2</sup> J. Meyendorff. *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1974. p.70

15.13 = 881D). Renunciation of 'gross flesh' is a condition of the spiritual ascent (30.36 = 30.18 = 1160D). Mortification of the body is the primary task of a monk, and his overall spiritual success depends on how this particular task is performed (1.24 = 1.45 = 641C, 15.8 = 15.4 = 881A etc). 'Be at constant enmity with your body. The flesh is a headstrong and treacherous friend. The more you care for it, the more it injures you' (9.9 = 9.8 = 841C). 'Those who have obtained mourning ... flee from their body as from an enemy' (7.28 = 7.31 = 808B). 'He who coddles the body makes it still wilder' (14.6 = 14.3 = 864C). A 'heavy and savage body' is a 'monster' (θήριον) (26.15 = 26.13 = 1016D), and its desires are mad (2.7 = 2.12 = 656D). The passage, which describes the prison for penitent monks, has been a stumbling block for many readers, and it deserves to be quoted in full, as one of the most colourful ones from the whole book: 'From the number of their prostrations their knees seemed to have become wooden, their eyes dim and sunk deep within their sockets. They had no hair. Their cheeks were bruised and burnt by the scalding of hot tears. Their faces were pale and wasted. They were quite indistinguishable from corpses. Their breasts were livid from blows; and from their frequent beating of the chest, they spat blood. Where was to be found in this place any rest on beds, or clean and starched clothes? They were all torn, dirty and covered with lice...Often they applied to ... the shepherd ... and begged him to put irons and chains on their hands and neck, and to manacle their legs in the stocks...I ask you brothers, not to regard all this as a made-up story' (5.19-20 = 5.5 = 772AB). Their abbot, whom Climacus calls a 'lamp of discernment', would often order the penitents to be buried without appropriate rites (5.21 = 5.5 = 772C), and it seems that they were dying on a regular basis (5.22 = 5.5 = 772CD). To a modern reader this description may

seem to describe a concentration camp rather than a Christian institution, and he could have doubts concerning the psychic health of these monks or the spiritual qualities of their abbot. D.Chitty writes about his friend, a Russian archimandrite, who had started reading the *Scala* when he was still a layman, upon reaching this description decided the book was not for him)<sup>1</sup>. We have also met a number of people with the same or similar experience. This is not however the impression which Climacus himself had from visiting this prison. He writes: 'I found so much pleasure in their grief that I forgot myself, and was wholly rapt in mind (τῷ νοῦ συνηρώγην), and could not contain myself' (5.25 = 5.5 = 776B). We may ask: why did Climacus insert this story into the book? He gives no indication that he wants his readers to imitate the penitents he described in their treatment of their bodies. The context suggests that Climacus calls his readers to learn a lesson of uncompromising love towards God, of determination to do *anything* to regain broken communion with God.

It has to be admitted, however, that on the whole Climacus' attitude to the body is much more negative than, for example, that of Macarius. It is interesting that while Climacus relates Rom. 7.24 'who will rescue me from this body of death' to the body (15.31 = 15.29 = 885D), Macarius relates it to the soul (*Coll. H* 1.7). However, the body for Climacus is an instrument in the work of salvation, as well as an obstacle. If taken out of the context, the above-mentioned passages can be read as Manichean in outlook. It is precisely the possibility to use the body both as an instrument of salvation and as a means of estrangement from God, which is the foundation of Christian asceticism.

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<sup>1</sup> *Desert*, p.174

Climacus speaks about the body as a ‘temple of God’ (1.24 = 1.44 = 641C), and it is therefore possible to speak about fornication as being not a sin of the body, but a sin against the body (15.43 = 15.40 = 888D – 889A)<sup>1</sup>. ‘It is amazing to see the bodiless mind defiled and darkened by the body, and likewise what is immaterial to be purified and refined through clay’ (14.28 = 14.24 = 868C). Climacus admits that both mind and body are instruments in acquiring virtues (23.16 = 22.16 = 968C). An outward position of body may conform to penitence (4.66 = 4.58 = 709B), and to prayer, particularly in the early stages, when the ‘prayer of the heart’ has not yet been obtained (15.81 = 15.76 = 900C). Climacus repeats this idea again in his discourse on prayer: ‘In the case of the imperfect, the mind often conforms to the body’ (28.23 = 28.25 = 1133B). The body is essential for the gift of tears.

An elderly monk says to Climacus, ‘still (φίμω) your mind, overbusy with its private concerns ... by the practical means of showing your neighbour all love and sympathy’ (4.36 = 4.31 = 700D). Thus, by one’s bodily service it is possible to silence the attention of the mind to oneself, through redirecting care and concern towards others. Climacus brings up this idea again towards the end of the book: ‘The Master, knowing that the virtue of the soul is modelled on its outward behaviour, took a towel and showed us the way of humility. For the soul becomes like its bodily occupations. It confirms itself to its activities and takes its shape from them’ (25.58 = 25.54 = 1000D – 1001A).

In the course of one’s spiritual journey, not only one’s inner condition changes, but one’s body is transformed. ‘I think that one ought not to call anyone a saint in any real sense of the word, until he has transformed this earth into

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 6.18.

holiness, if such a transformation is even possible' (15.52 = 15.49 = 889C). 'Man ought to use every possibility to raise his clay, so to speak, and seat it on the throne of God. And let no one make excuses for not undertaking this ascent, because the way and the door are open' (26.135 = 26-2.20 = 1064AB). The body changes through union with Christ in the Eucharist (28.52 = 28.52 = 1137C). Through ἀπάρθεια flesh becomes incorruptible (ἄφθαρτός) (29.3 = 29.2 = 1148B). In the course of spiritual progress, the essential characteristics of the body change, it becomes imperious to sickness (30.19 = 30.11 = 1157B)<sup>1</sup>, and it overcomes its dependence on food (30.18 = 30.11 = 1157B)<sup>2</sup>. The inner life continues even when the body is asleep (20.20 = 19.13 = 941C). Even the outward look of the body changes, it manifests the inner enlightenment. 'When the whole man is, in a manner, commingled with the love of God, then even his outward appearance in the body, as in a kind of mirror, shows the splendour of his soul. That is how the God-seer Moses was glorified' (30.17 = 30.11 = 1157B). Climacus describes a monk Menas in a monastery he had visited. On the third day of Menas' death, during the funeral service the air was filled with fragrance, and his body started to exude myrrh. Climacus attributes this to his humility and obedience (4.34 = 4.29 = 697C). The body of another virtuous ascetic, Hesychius the Horebite, was not recovered after his burial (6.18 = 6.20 = 797A).

Macarius, too, speaks about the incorruptible glory of the resurrection, which is already present with saints (*Coll. H.* 4.9, 32.2). Like Climacus, Macarius uses Moses as an example of someone whose body reflected the glory

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Alph. Macarius* 2, which describes two ascetics who lived naked in the desert for forty years unharmed either by winter cold or by summer heat.

<sup>2</sup> This idea is also suggested by Gregory of Nyssa *Vita Mosis* I.58, cf. Athanasius *Vita Antonii* 8. Palladius describes a monk whose only food for three years was Holy Communion (*Historia Lausiaca* 13.4).

of God<sup>1</sup> and who transcended the natural capacities of his body, being able not to eat or drink for forty days. The laws of matter are transcended by partaking in 'spiritual food' (*Ibid.* 5.10). 'As the body of the Lord was glorified, when he went up into the mountain, and was transfigured, into the divine glory and into the infinite light, so are the bodies of the saints glorified and shine like lightning. The glory, which was within Christ, was outspread upon His body and shone; and in like manner in the saints...For even now they partake of His substance and nature in their minds' (*Ibid.* 15.38). Macarius' optimistic view of the body is rooted in his eschatology. After the general resurrection, when all people will be 'changed into the divine nature, being good, and Gods, and children of God', the bodies will be glorified together with souls' (*Ibid.* 34.2).

According to Diadochus, the *voûs* draws the body with itself into the depths of the Divine love (*Cap. Gnost.* 33), communicating its joy to the body (*Ibid.* 25). This joy is 'unfailing recalling (*ὑπόμνησις*) of the life without corruption' (*Ibid.* 25). Diadochus comes to the central issue – it is the future bodily resurrection and enjoyment of communion with God, which makes the bodily experience of the Divine love possible.

Climacus often uses the language of nature and transcending nature in regards to the body. Fasting, that is, limitation of food intake, is 'coercion of nature (*βία φύσεως*)' (14.33 = 14.31 = 869A) and it is 'the acme of temperance for a hungry man to overcome nature when it is blameless' (29.10 = 29.7 = 1149A). 'Force of nature' (*βία<sup>2</sup> τῆς φύσεως*) is behind the necessity to sleep (5.5 = 5.5 = 765A, also 19.1 = 18.1 = 937A, 26.42 = 26.29 = 1024A). By thinking

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Apophthegmata Alph.* Pambo 12: 'They said of Abba Pambo that he was like Moses, who received the image of the glory of Adam when his face shone. His face shone like lightning and he was like a king sitting on his throne. It was the same with Abba Silvanus and Abba Sisoës.'

<sup>2</sup> Apparently, Climacus uses *βία* to convey both 'power' and 'coercion'.

about the infernal flame the consumption of water may be decreased, and, thus, nature can be violated (7.18 = 7.21 = 805B). Tears may originate simply ‘from nature’ (ἐκ φύσεως) (7.32 = 7.34 = 808B), but natural tears are to be transformed into spiritual tears (7.34 = 7.36 = 808C). Sexual desire is natural, but it must be overcome. Nature is on the side of the demon of fornication (15.24 = 15.20 = 884A, 15.33 = 15.31 = 888A), because ‘everything created longs insatiably for what is akin to it ... And does not flesh desire flesh?’ (15.27 = 15.23 = 884C). Therefore, purity (ἀγνεία) is a ‘supernatural denial of nature (φύσεως ὑπὲρ φύσιν ὑπερφυῆς ἄρνησις), which means that a mortal and corruptible body is rivalling the celestial spirits in a truly marvellous way’ (15.1 = 880D)<sup>1</sup>. ‘He who has conquered his body has conquered nature, and he who has conquered nature has certainly risen above nature (ὑπὲρ φύσιν). And he who has done it is little (if at all) lower than the angels’ (15.71 = 15.70 = 896C). ‘It is impossible for anyone to conquer his own nature. When nature is defeated, it should be recognized that this is due to the presence of Him who is above nature (ὑπὲρ φύσιν)’ (15.7 = 15.4 = 881A).

To be brief, by ‘nature’ Climacus denotes the aspects of human life, which belong to the sphere of his fallen and sinful being. The supernatural realm belongs to the state of the human being, which is transfigured through the exercise of will in its direction towards God. This concept is an expression of Climacus’ strong belief that the inner life is dependent upon the life of the body.

With regard to the tears as an example of redirection of natural sexual desire Brown suggests the implicit dependence of Climacus upon the view in the ancient medical tradition, which would explain both sensuality, expressed in

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<sup>1</sup> We followed Rader’s reading in this passage.



tears, and sexual desire by excessive bodily humour<sup>1</sup>. He refers to Pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomonica*, which in fact reads: 'The charitable (ἐλεήμονες) ... are ever prone to tears ... fond of women (φιλογύναιοι) ... they are amorous by nature (ἐρωτικοί), inclined to be reminiscent, of good dispositions and warm hearts' (808A). Indeed, this passage is somewhat similar to Climacus: 'Those who are inclined to sensuality often seem sympathetic, merciful and prone to compunction' (15.47 = 15.43 = 889A). However, when *Physiognomonica* affirms the connection between sensuality and tears, it neither gives a physiological basis for this dependence, nor does it affirm the identity of the 'humour' of the two substances. Brown's other example, which comes from Barsanuphius of Gaza, does not support his claim either. According to Barsanuphius, 'If the enemy has dried the source of the tears of your heart, but has multiplied your bodily liquid (ὕγρανε σου τὴν ὑπογαστέρα), receive the Lord in your house, and He will dry it, and will purify the source of your tears, so that it will again produce noetic water' (*Corr.* 18). Here, too, Barsanuphius seems to speak about the incompatibility of the sexual impulse with retaining πένθος, rather than about the demonic diversion of the humour of tears into the lower parts of the body. Neither Pseudo-Aristotle nor Barsanuphius explicitly affirm the physiological unity of tears and sperm.

However, the issue of emissions which Brown raises is an important one and occupies a prominent place in monastic literature. We are now going to look closer at the issue of nocturnal emissions in Climacus, and see how this problem as a case-study relates to his view of the body in general.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brown. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. London: Faber, 1989. p. 238.

Climacus distinguishes three reasons for nocturnal emissions, abundance of food and life of ease being the main one. They can also come from conceit or judging one's neighbour, which may happen even to the sick and to the strict fasters (15.55 = 15.52-53 = 889D – 892A, 26.21 = 26.16 = 1017D, 26.87 = 26.59 = 1032B). Demons cause pollutions in hesychasts by causing life-like dreams (27.49 = 27-2.15 = 1109D), but some even in their dreams shame the demons by admonishing dissolute women concerning chastity (27.74 = 27-2.43 = 1116B). Thus, in both instances Climacus suggests both physiological and spiritual realities behind emissions and their evasion.

What stands behind Climacus vision of the connection between the activity of the body and the ascetic struggle – a tradition of monastic experience or ancient conceptions of human physiology? Climacus is clear about the connection between the diet and sexual impulse: 'Foods which inflate the stomach also excite the body' (14.12 = 14.9 = 865C), 'Satiety in food is the father of fornication' (14.5 = 14.3 = 864C), while 'the quenching of fleshly burning is fasting' (26.s6 = 26-3.2 = 1084C). The belief that bodily desires and passions, particularly the sexual desire and the excitement of sexual organs are dependent upon the intake of food and alcohol had certainly been a common place in the ascetic tradition before Climacus. According to Nemesius, although sexual impulse is natural, it can nevertheless be controlled. Sperm originates from blood (*De Nat. Hom.* 25), while blood originates from food (*Ibid.* 23). He also makes clear that as the generative faculty belongs to that part of the bodily functions not answerable to reason, ejaculations during sleep are involuntary (*Ibid.* 25). This dependence of the production of sperm on food intake, which is implicit in Nemesius, is explicit in the *Historia Monachorum*, where a monk is

called to 'transcend the law of nature and must certainly not fall into the slightest pollution of the flesh. On the contrary, he must mortify the flesh and not allow an excess of seminal fluid to accumulate. We should therefore try to keep the fluid depleted by the prolongation of fasting' (XX.3)<sup>1</sup>. Diadochus is also certain about such dependence (*Cap. Gnost.* 43, 49, 50).

Athanasius of Alexandria had a different opinion on this subject. He avoids the language of 'defilement' or 'pollution', for him emissions are nothing more than a natural phenomenon: 'what sin or uncleanness is there in any natural secretion, - as though a man were minded to make a culpable matter of the cleanings of the nose or the sputa from the mouth'? (*Ep. ad Amun.* PG 26. 1172A)<sup>2</sup>. As Climacus does not speak explicitly about possible guilt for pollutions, it cannot be said that Athanasius and Climacus hold opposite opinions. However, for Climacus emissions are something that is essentially different from other natural processes, and they are transcended in the course of spiritual progress. What stands behind Athanasius' views is his positive view of the human body. 'All things made by God are beautiful and pure ... moreover if we believe man to be, as the divine scriptures say, the work of God's hands, how could any defiled work proceed from a pure Power?' (*Ibid.* 1169A – 1172B). This is not the kind of language Climacus uses to speak about the body. For him positive language can only be applied to the body, which is transformed.

Likewise, Cassian seems to be less rigorous than Climacus regarding pollutions: they are a 'natural necessity', which however should happen without

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<sup>1</sup> This opinion may also be found in *Ep.* 1 of Anthony the Great.

<sup>2</sup> For the context and analysis of this letter see *The Monastic Letters of Saint Athanasius the Great*. Translated with an introduction by L.W. Barnard. Oxford: SLG, 1994. pp. 354-356 and Brakke, D. *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. pp. 95-99.

any image provoking it, which would be a sign of hidden concupiscence (*Conl.* II.XXIII.1, also XII.VIII.5, XII.XVI.2)<sup>1</sup>.

Climacus also distinguishes three stages in progress in purity: refusal to consent to thoughts and occasional emissions unaccompanied by fantasies (ἀνειδῶλοι ... ἐκκρίσεις), natural movements due only to the excess of food which are unaccompanied by fantasies (φυσικαὶ κινήσεις ... ἀνειδῶλως συνιστάμεναι), and are free of any discharge (ρέυσεως ἀπηλλαγμέναι), and mortification of the body preceded by the mortification of the thoughts (15.8 = 15.4 = 881A). Essentially he adopts the Evagrian distinction between the imageless movements of the body (αἱ ἀνειδῶλοι ... τοῦ σώματος φυσικαὶ κινήσεις) and those with images, the first signifying the health of the soul (*Prakt.* 55). By speaking about these imageless movements as a sign of the health of the soul, Evagrius relates them to the realm of ἀπάθεια. By defining these imageless movements as an intermediary stage Climacus is more rigid - precisely because he believes in a stronger impact of the spiritual life upon the bodily life.

Does Climacus see emissions as morally culpable? Is one responsible for one's involuntary emissions? The pollutions following 'lifelike dreams' are the result of the demonic attacks (27.49 = 27-2.15 = 1109D), but the sign of true purity is to be unmoved (τὸ ἀκίνητον εἶναι) by dreams during sleep (15.13 = 15.10 = 881B). Although Climacus speaks about defilement by pollutions (e.g. 4.58 = 4.50 = 708A), he avoids speaking about direct responsibility for pollutions, apparently seeing them as a natural experience in those who have not achieved perfection, as it follows from the statement on degrees of purity above.

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<sup>1</sup> For nocturnal emissions in Cassian see Stewart. *Cassian.* pp.81-83.

Although Climacus accepts the dependence of sexual desire and emissions from food, the *Scala* is an example of how monastic outlook shifts the discussion of the body from the sphere of physiology to that of morality. His discussion on pollutions shows that what Climacus ultimately believes in is the radical transcendence of natural processes by Divine grace.

How does Climacus see the proper relation between body and soul? ‘Not he who has kept his clay undefiled is pure, but he who has completely subjected his members to his soul’ (15.10 = 15.6 = 881B), writes Climacus, perhaps recalling *Vita Antonii* 45. Here he expresses the quintessence of his attitude to the body – the spiritual progress signifies the attainment of the primordial subordination of body to soul, which has been reversed as a result of the Fall. ‘Woe to us, for the main human faculty, soul is subordinate to flesh, which is the soul’s slave, instead of both of them in agreement to serve their creator’ (Isaiah *Ascet.* 29.3).

How is sin introduced within man – through his body or through his mind? Climacus writes: ‘Some say that it is from thoughts of fornication (ἐκ τῶν λογισμῶν τῆς πορνείας) that passions invade the body. But some affirm, on the contrary, that it is from the bodily senses that evil thoughts are born (ἐκ τῶν τοῦ σώματος αἰσθήσεων τοὺς πονηροὺς ἀποτίκτεσθαι λογισμούς). The former say that if the mind (νοῦς) had not gone before, the body would not have followed after ... saying that often bad thoughts manage to enter into a heart as the result of a pleasant sight, or the touch of perfume, or hearing sweet voices’ (15.76 = 15.74 = 897C). Although Climacus does not give a definitive answer, he concludes: ‘Some passions pass to the body from the soul and some do the opposite. The latter happens to people living the monastic life,

because of lack of outward stimulus' (15.77 = 15.75 = 897D). While this passage recalls Evagrius (*Prakt.* 48.), the previous one seems to allude to Mark the Monk. Mark wrote: 'When you sin, blame your thought (τὴν ἔννοιαν), not your action. For had your intellect (νοῦς) not run ahead, your body would not have followed' (*Leg.* 120). He insists on the responsibility of the intellect elsewhere: 'when you find that something is disturbing you deeply in yourself and is breaking the stillness of your intellect (τὸν νοῦν ἡσυχάζοντα) with passion, you may be sure that it was your intellect which, taking the initiative, first activated it and placed it in your heart' (*Ibid.* 180). 'The intellect does many good things and bad things without the body, whereas the body can do neither good nor evil without the intellect. This is because the law of freedom (ὁ νόμος τῆς ἐλευθερίας) applies to what happens before we act' (*Justif.* 16).

It is interesting that in this respect Mark appeals to the 'law of freedom', thus affirming the principle of responsibility, while earlier we saw the opposite: Climacus affirming this principle, not developing the notion of πρόληψις, which is prominent in Mark.

So, Climacus' view of body is dubious, and he is aware of this. He writes: 'I do not know by what habit and rule I can bind this friend of mine ... How can I hate him whom by nature I habitually love? How can I get free of him with whom I am bound forever? How can I escape what will share my resurrection? How am I to make immortal what has received a mortal nature? What argument can I use to one who has the argument of nature on his side ... for he is an ally and a foe, an assistant and a rival, a defender and a traitor ... If I mortify him, I endanger myself. If I strike him down, I have nothing with which to obtain virtues' (15.87-88 = 15.83 = 901CD). However, when after these statements

Climacus enters into a dialogue with the body, it has nothing positive to say about itself, and admits that eventually its head is to be cut off (15.90 = 15.73 = 904B).

The tension represented here has been ever present in the Christian tradition since the Pauline epistles, as it can be seen, for example, from the fact that in the passage above Climacus almost quotes Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or* 14.6-7). Likewise, in the Pauline epistles 'the war of the spirit against the flesh and of the flesh against the spirit was a desperate image of human resistance to the will of God'<sup>1</sup>. However, a careful reading shows that Paul should not be accused of a dualistic approach to the body. As K. Ware points out, "'Flesh' in Paul's usage signifies, not the bodily or physical aspect, but total humanity – soul and body together – in so far as it is separated from God and in rebellion against him. By the same token 'spirit' designates, not the soul, but human personhood in its entirety – body and soul together – when it is living in obedience to God and in communion with Him.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed, if one attempts a more than superficial reading of Paul, one can see that he adopts the holistic approach of the Old Testament, and body (σῶμα) is something one *is* rather than something one *has*<sup>3</sup>.

To discuss the variety of ways in which the human body was understood in the Christian tradition, would be outside of the scope of this work<sup>4</sup>, but we can identify few basic outlooks.

In the earliest period of the Church, different distinctive anthropological models were suggested.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown. *Body*. p.48.

<sup>2</sup> K. Ware. "My Helper and My Enemy": *The Body in Greek Christianity*. In: *Religion and the Body*. Ed. by S. Coackley. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997. p. 93. This is essentially Robinson's conclusion: see J.A.T. Robinson. *The Body: a Study in Pauline Theology*. London : SCM, 1952. esp. pp. 17-33.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson. *Body*. p.28.

<sup>4</sup> For a full discussion see Brown. *Body*. and Ware. *Body*.

According to Ireneaus, not only the human soul, but also the human body is created in God's image, so that 'the visible appearance too should be Godlike' (*Demonstr.* 11). Thus, 'the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God' (*Adv. Haer.* 5.6.1). This outlook leads Ireneaus to develop the Pauline notion of the body being the temple of God (*Ibid.* 5.6.1-2).

Origen's view of the body, with a specific cosmology behind it, was different: 'it does not seem possible to say that the nature which is in the body can either be like the divine nature, which is certainly above all things incorporeal, or that it can be truly and rightly described as becoming one with it' (*De Princ.* 3.6.1). Man was created as immaterial  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , and only after the Fall did matter come into being. Moreover, men are to be incorporeal (or, rather, possessing 'ethereal bodies') after the resurrection. Therefore, he views the body as something, which is external to personhood, although not intrinsically evil. One could argue as to whether Origen simply avoids a crude understanding of resurrection, but the difference between Ireneaus and Origen is apparent. In his eschatology Origen was an heir to the Hellenic notion of the pre-existence of the soul and the transmigration of souls rather than to the doctrine of the bodily resurrection, which emerged in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>. By placing the body within the 'second creation', Origen makes it external to personality.

In the desert tradition various approaches to the body may be found. Abba Zosimus called it 'the most precious of our possessions'<sup>2</sup>. The *Apophthegmata*

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<sup>1</sup> It would be an exaggeration to say that Origen viewed the Resurrection in purely non-material categories, but his view of matter was very 'non-material'. See H. Crouzel. *Origen*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1989. pp. 90-92.

<sup>2</sup> PG 78. 1681A.



relates the story of how a monk to his surprise saw Abba Poemen washing his feet. To the monk's question Pambo, who 'enjoyed freedom of speech', replied: 'We have not been taught to kill our bodies, but to kill our passions' (*Alph.* Poemen 184). Amma Theodora said: 'Give the body discipline and you will see that the body is for Him who made it' (*Alph.* Theodora 4). Similarly, Abba Isaiah wrote: 'Woe to us, that our body, intended for eternal light, we have brought to eternal darkness' (*Ascet.* 29.1). Mark the Monk compares the human body with earth, which needs to be cultivated in order to bring forth good fruit. (*Jej.* III 7-9). Many writers warned against immoderate asceticism. In the words of Diadochus, 'The body of one pursuing the spiritual way must not be enfeebled; it must have enough strength for its labours, so that the soul may be suitably purified through bodily exertion as well' (*Cap. Gnost.* 45)<sup>1</sup>.

Grimmer examples may be found, especially in the *Historia Lausiaca*. Palladius reports the words of Dorotheos about his body: 'It kills me and I kill it' (*Historia Lausiaca* 2.2). Another monk cuts off his ear in order to escape ordination, and promises to cut out his tongue (*Ibid.* 11.2). Palladius also narrates the story about Macarius of Alexandria who, having killed a gnat, which had bitten him, repented and went off to the marsh to be bitten by mosquitoes to the extent he was thought to have had elephantiasis and was only recognized by his voice (*Ibid.* 18.4). There is an attitude of indifference: in a state of extreme sickness, Abba Benjamin said to his visitors: 'this body did not help me when it was well, nor it has caused me harm when faring badly' (*Ibid.* 12.2). This attitude was reflected in the attitude to food: while abba Isaac added ashes from the censer to his food (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Isaac, Priest of the Cells 6), George of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Alph.* Arsenius 22, 24, Ammonas 4, Gelasius 6, Poemen 31, *Sbo.* 64, *Am. Letter.* 21.

Choziba, together with his brother, ate from a pot, which has never been washed, full of maggots and foul-smelling (*Vita Sancti Georgii Chozibitae* 6).

It would be tempting to reconcile the positions, which these passages represent, but perhaps it would be more honest to accept the existence of a variety of approaches within the Christian tradition. So which current did Climacus belong to?

In the words of K. Ware, 'To appreciate John's attitude aright, and to avoid unjustly accusing him of an anti-Christian body-soul dualism, it is important to determine on what level he is speaking in each particular passage: whether of the body in its true and natural state, as formed by the Creator, or of the body as we know it now, in its contranatural or fallen condition'<sup>1</sup>. It would seem to us a somewhat one-sided position to see Climacus' view of the body as 'Origenist'. The *Scala* suggests the gradual 'spiritualization', not in a sense of denying the body, but in a sense of submitting the life of the body to the life of the spirit. In Brown's words, 'John had inherited from the desert tradition the expectation that the power of Christ could embrace both body and soul'<sup>2</sup>.

However, when we look at John Climacus and the ascetic tradition which he belonged to, we can see that the hostile view of the body, even its fallen state, is something unprecedented in the Scripture, while many parallels may be found with Platonic and Stoic approaches. R. Meyer points to the striking parallel between in the *Life of Anthony* and Porphyrius' famous beginning of *Life of Plotinus*<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> *Introduction*. In: Saint John Climacus. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Tr. by C. Luibheid and N. Russell. New York: Paulist Press, 1982. p.28.

<sup>2</sup> Brown. *Body*. p.238.

<sup>3</sup> St. Athanasius. *The Life of Saint Anthony*. Tr. and annot. by R.T.Meyer. The Newman Press 1950 (ACW 10). p.118. n.161.

‘When he was about to eat and sleep and provide for the other needs of the body, shame overcame him as he thought of the spiritual nature of the soul’ (*Vita Antonii* 45).

‘Plotinus, the philosopher who lived in our day, appeared to be ashamed of being in a body’ (*Vita Plotini* 1).

The differences in the two *Lives* are obvious, but both descriptions to some extent summarize the message of both treatises of detachment from concerns of the body in one’s quest for God<sup>1</sup>. The hostile vision of body in some Christian sources may be explained by the biblical doctrine of the Fall. The ascetic experience of the human body may also be a possible source of passions and an obstacle in spiritual life, but K Ware does justice to the Christian tradition, when he describes the Platonic influence as largely responsible for an unresolved tension in many Greek Christian texts<sup>2</sup>. This tension is present in the *Scala*, too. It would be an oversimplification, of course, to say that Climacus abandons the Scriptural holistic view of the human person and adopts the christianised Hellenic model. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that Climacus reinterprets the two in the context of the three hundred years of monastic tradition with its own perception of the human body and its role in one’s efforts to draw nearer to God.

Climacus’ ladder of ascent is not to be understood in a narrow spiritual sense: the human being ascends to God in his integrity. Body and soul live one life, and reducing the spiritual task to inner life or communion with God to our

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<sup>1</sup> Typically for the Greek perception of philosophy and wisdom, the *Life* portrays Plotinus as more than just an outstanding thinker - he ‘certainly possessed by birth something more than other men’ (*Ibid.* 10). He is said to refuse to eat meat or to take a bath (*Ibid.* 2). He took very little food and slept little (*Ibid.* 8), and had insight of one’s inner disposition (*Ibid.* 11). He ‘sleeplessly kept his soul pure and ever strove towards the divine which he loved with all his soul’ (*Ibid.* 23).

<sup>2</sup> *Body*, p. 91.

inner being would have the same consequences as deficient Christology. The reason behind the patristic emphasis on the fullness of the Divine incarnation was that the entirety of human nature ought to be in communion with God and to be divinised. Ascetic writers, like John Climacus, convey the same truth, but with a different vocabulary and in a different context.

## *PASSIONS AND ΠΙΠΤΕΙΑ*

### *Introduction*

The language of struggle with passions has traditionally been used in the Christian spiritual tradition to convey the inner struggle of man, his attempts to regain the inner harmony, lost through the Fall. This inner effort follows one's acknowledgment of discord with the primordial beauty of the Divine image. Thus, Christian asceticism, of which struggle with passions forms a crucial part, signifies that the salvation of man depends not only on the οἰκονομία of Christ without any human participation on human behalf, but also on a human readiness to accept the gifts, offered by Christ, on inner disposition which makes one able to receive them.

Monastic spiritual tradition, which was primarily concerned with recovering personal integrity, gradually acquired experience of various human conditions of the human soul, either purified by the Divine grace or distorted by adherence to the demonic powers. This experience needed to be systematized, and a corresponding vocabulary needed to be found. The *Scala* is, perhaps, the first attempt to present various phenomena of the inner life in one single treatise. Summarizing this experience of the three hundred years of monastic tradition,

Climacus uses extensively the terminology of πάθος and ἀπάθεια. It would be outside of the scope of this research to analyse all the various usages of the terms πάθος and ἀπάθεια in the Fathers, as well as analysing every particular passion and its correlation to others. In this chapter we shall try to examine the main trends of the Christian tradition before Climacus and see how it made use of classical definitions of πάθος and ἀπάθεια. We shall also investigate how Climacus, in his turn, developed the conclusions of his predecessors.

### *Passions*

How was passion understood in the classical world?

In the *Respublica* (IV, 439 d – 444 e) Plato distinguishes 3 parts of human soul: that by which it reckons and reasons the rational (τὸ λογιστικόν), as opposed to the appetitive (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) which may make one behave ‘as an animal’ (439 b), and the irascible (τὸ θυμοειδές). Although τὸ λογιστικόν is superior to τὸ θυμοειδές, τὸ θυμοειδές may be ‘the helper of reason by nature unless it is corrupted by evil nurture’ (ἐπίκουρον ὃν τῷ λογιστικῷ φύσει, ἐὰν μὴ ὑπὸ κακῆς τροφῆς διαφθαρῇ) (441 a). Even anger can be an ally of τὸ λογιστικόν (440 cd). Thus, a just man is he in whom each of these parts perform their own task (441 e). This harmony, achieved by self-mastery and attainment of beautiful order within oneself, means that the inner fragmentation is mastered and man becomes ‘one instead of many’ (παντάπασιν ἓνα γεγόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν) (443 de). Later on, Plato goes on to say that each of these divisions has its own desires (ἐπιθυμίαι), corresponding to it, love for truth being characteristic of τὸ λογιστικόν (580 d – 583 a). Although ‘terrible and irresistible’ παθήματα such as pleasure, pain, rashness, fear, anger

and hope (*Timaeus* 69 cd) do not belong to τὸ λογιστικόν, Plato makes clear that the combination of ‘mortal’ and ‘immortal’ principles of soul was created ‘according to necessary laws’ (*Ibid.* 69 d), because God created all things in ‘all the measures and harmonies they could possibly receive’ (*Ibid.* 69 b). In *Phaedrus* the picture is similar. Plato draws an image of the chariot, the charioteer being the superior part, striving towards The Beauty, and the two horses representing noble and base emotions. However, when tamed by the charioteer, the second gradually learns to carry the charioteer to the Beauty together with the first one (253 d – 254 b).

Aristotle articulates more clearly that not only the mode of human acting (πρᾶξις) is important, but also man’s inner disposition, as the two are inseparable in his understanding of human virtue. Aristotle produces the following list of πάθη: ‘desire, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, friendship, hatred, longing, jealousy, pity, and generally those states of consciousness which are accompanied by pleasure or pain’ (*Eth. Nic.* II.IV.1105 b). Similarly to Plato, he speaks about the part of the soul which is irrational, and although it is παρὰ τὸν λόγον, resisting and opposing it is not in itself bad, but in the continent man it obeys the rational principle, which would be characteristic of a brave man (*Ibid.* I. XIII, 1102 b). Thus, if τὸ ἄλογον is obedient to λόγος ‘as a child to its father’ (*Ibid.* I. XIII, 1103 a), it does somehow share in this rational principle (*Ibid.* I. XIII, 1102 b). One must live κατὰ λόγον, while it is characteristic of young people (or older people immature in character) to live κατὰ πάθος (*Ibid.* I. III, 1095 a). Unlike virtues and vices, which imply our personal choice, πάθη, being present within us without choice (ἄπροαιρέτως) (*Ibid.* II. V, 1106 a), are neutral. They have to be felt moderately (εἰ δὲ μέσως)

(*Ibid.* II. V, 1105 b) and ‘in a certain way’ (ὁ πῶς) (*Ibid.* II V. 1106a). This is how πάθη are linked to Aristotle’s central concept of ‘mean’ (μεσότης): he defines virtue in terms of finding the right balance between, for example, cowardice and extreme rashness, excessive modesty and deficiency in shame, etc. (*Ibid.* II.VII-VIII. 1107 b - 1109 a)<sup>1</sup>.

For the Stoics it was characteristic to use the language of disease for passion<sup>2</sup>. According to Cicero, the πάθη (which he translates as ‘disease’ (morbus), but prefers to call ‘emotion’) have various divisions within four classes – sorrow, fear, lust and pleasure (*De Finibus* III. 35). According to Stobaeus, Zeno gave the following definition of passion: ‘πάθος is an excessive impulse (ὁρμή πλεονάζουσα). He does not say ‘that which has become excessive’ (πεφυκυῖα πλεονάζειν), but being excessive, not potentially (οὐ γὰρ δυνάμει), but actually (δ’ ἐνεργεία)’ (SVF I. 206) A similar explanation of the nature of passion may be found in Chrysippus. He defines it as ‘the movement contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν κινήσεως) which occurs irrationally (ἀλόγως) in this way, and the excess in impulses (ἐν ταῖς ὁρμαῖς πλεονασμοῦ) ... since people overstep the proper and natural (καθ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ φυσικὴν) proportion of their impulses.’ He gives the following example: ‘When someone walks in accordance with his impulse (καθ’ ὁρμήν), the movement of his legs is not excessive but commensurate with his impulse, so that he can stop or change whenever he wants to. But when people run according to their impulse, this sort of thing no longer

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to find an echo of Aristotle a thousand years later in the younger contemporary of Climacus, Dorotheos of Gaza: ‘Therefore, we say that virtue stands in the middle; and so courage stands in the middle between cowardice and foolhardiness; humility in the middle between arrogance and obsequiousness. Modesty is a mean between bashfulness and boldness – and so on with other virtues’ (*Instr.* X.106). For the importance of ‘mean’ in Aristotle see D. Bostock. *Aristotle’s Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Ch. II.3.4.

<sup>2</sup> See J.M. Rist. *Stoic philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. p. 27, M. Pohlenz. *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung*. Göttingen. Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1948-1949. 2 vols. Vol. 2. p.82

happens. The movement of their legs exceeds their impulse, so that they are carried away and unable to change obediently, as soon as they have started to do so. Something similar, I think takes place with impulses, owing to their going beyond rational proportion (κατὰ λόγον ὑπερβαίνειν συμμετρίαν). The result is that when someone has the impulse he is not obedient to reason' (SVF III. 462). We can see that the essence of passion is seen in misusing the natural emotional faculties, which are not by themselves evil. Stoics believed that the wise man possesses three basic states, which are emotional and rational at the same time: joy, wishfulness and a sense of precaution (χαρά, βούλησις and εὐλάβεια), called εὐπάθειαι (e.g. SVF III. 431, 432)<sup>1</sup>.

What is the essential message of the philosophers we have looked at? Human emotions by themselves do not undermine the harmony of man – this only happens when emotions serve a bad purpose, or when they are out of control. How did the Fathers see the proper emotional life of man? What the Fathers meant by πάθος was often not what we would describe in modern language as 'passionate', meaning excessive emotion. Πάθος was the usual word to convey the disfigured conditional of emotional life, although the term was understood with a great deal of fluidity<sup>2</sup>.

Clement of Alexandria gives the following definition of passion: 'Passion (πάθος) is an excessive impulse (πλεονάζουσα ὁρμή) exceeding the measures of reason, or appetite unbridled and disobedient to the word. Passions, then, are a movement of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason (παρὰ φύσιν οὖν κίνησις ψυχῆς κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν λόγον ἀπειθειαν τὰ

<sup>1</sup> See R. Sorabji. *Emotions and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. pp. 47-51.

<sup>2</sup> See the entry in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Ed. by G.W.H Lampe. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1961. p. 992.



πάθη) (*Strom.* 2.13.59). For example, opposing the definition of fear as ‘an irrational aberration and passion’ (ἄλογος ἑκκλισις ὁ φόβος ἐστὶ καὶ πάθος), Clement says that fear is λογικός and exalts εὐλάβεια – a kind of fear, which is a ‘shunning agreeable to reason’ (εὐλογον οὖσαν ἑκκλινειν) (*Ibid.* 2.7.32-33). The similarity of Clement’s formula ‘πλεονάζουσα ὁρμή’, and of his insistence on the control of emotions by the rational principle to earlier Stoic definitions is obvious<sup>1</sup>.

Gregory of Nyssa poses a question in *De Anima et Resurrectione*: are ‘the principle of desire’ (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) and ‘the principle of anger’ (τὸ θυμοειδές) consubstantial (συνουσιωμένα) with the soul, or external and alien to it? (*Ibid.* 49B). Gregory’s answer is that they are external, and, moreover, the reason battles with them (*Ibid.* 53B), as he identifies the soul with its rational faculty (*Ibid.* 57B). Passions are essentially inevitable attributes of the soul’s embodiment, which the soul shares with the animals. Gregory disapproves the symbol of the chariot from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, because to him the image is not compatible with the doctrine of the creation of the soul in the Divine image (*Ibid.* 49C). Initially man did not have ‘the elements of passion and mortality’ (τὸ παθητικόν τε καὶ ἐπίκτητον) (*De Virg.* XII = GNO VIII, I. 298. 5-6), which would be incompatible with his Divine image (*De Anima* 57C). However, speaking about the πάθη of anger, greed etc, Gregory continues: ‘If reason (λογισμὸς) instead assumes sway over such emotions, each of them is transmuted to a form of virtue; for anger produces courage, terror caution, fear obedience, hatred aversion from vice, the power of love the desire for what is

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<sup>1</sup> S. Lilla successfully demonstrates the dependence of Clement’s view of passion on Middle Platonism and Philo: see *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*. Oxford University Press: London. 1971. pp. 84-92.

truly beautiful; high spirit in our character raises our thought above the passions ... and so we find that every such motion, when elevated by loftiness of mind, is conformed to the beauty of the Divine image' (*De Op. Hom.* 18.5). When the Divine image is recovered, 'reason and desire (ἡ λογιστική τε καὶ ἐπιθυμητική) and the faculty aroused by grief and anger, and whatever other faculties (δυνάμεις) there are, are looked upon as being connected with the soul, and they are logically considered as friends who rightly rejoice in the Lord when they all look to the beautiful and the good and do everything for the glory of God, for they are no longer the instruments of sin' (*De Virg.* XII. = GNO VIII,I 301.24-302.4 cf. 441,2). As examples, Gregory gives Daniel as an example of desire, and Phineas as an example of anger (*De Anima* 68 A, cf. Abba Isaiah *Ascet.* 2.2). Basil the Great essentially agrees with Gregory when he defines vice (πονηρά) as 'an evil use, and one contrary to the command of the Lord, of things given us by God for good' (*Reg. Fus. Tract.* 2)

Climacus does not present us with clear definitions of passion. However, few passages, where he is more explicit on their meaning, as well as Climacus' more specific advices, enable us to see his place in the ascetic tradition of understanding passions. The domination of man by passions, which Climacus compares to slavery (27.1 = 27.11 = 1096C), reflects the fallen state of the mankind. More than once Climacus uses the 'disease' language for passions, (1.7 = 1.15 = 636A, 26.13 = 26.11 = 1016B, 27.13 = 27.11 = 1097C), like the earlier authors (Clement of Alexandria *Paed.* 1.2, Basil the Great *Reg. Brev. Tract.* 301, Abba Isaiah *Ascet.* 19, 21.1, Barsanuphius and John of Gaza *Corr.* 109, 226, 327, 514, Dorotheos of Gaza *Instr.* XI. 113). He divides passions into visible (bodily) (παθῶν ὁρωμένων · ἡγουν σωματικῶν) and inner (τῶν ἐντὸς) (*Ad Past.* 12 =

1169A), which, again, is a traditional division (Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 37.32, Evagrius *Prakt.* 35, *Ad Eulog.* 23, Cassian *Conl.* V.IV). Climacus is also an heir to the later ascetic tradition, simply using πάθος synonymously with vice (26.67 = 26.41 = 1028A), or with demons (4.21 = 4.19 = 688C, 26.61 = 26.40 = 1025D) rather than defining πάθος as ‘mistaken judgment’ (ἡ ἐσφαλμένη κρίσις), like Maximus the Confessor (*Cap. Carit.* II.17,82). By linking all passions with the activity of corresponding demons throughout the treatise, Climacus expresses the ascetic understanding of πάθος, most clearly expressed by the author of the *Historia Monachorum*: ‘whichever passion one overcomes, one also drives out its corresponding demon. You must conquer the passions little by little in order to drive out the demons which belong to them’ (XV.3).

Thus, the dependence of Climacus on the preceding tradition is apparent. Climacus himself refers to the ‘discerning fathers’, who have compiled a least of eight passions, where avarice has the third place (17.16 = 16.24 = 929B). He also refers to the eightfold scheme of eight ‘capital vices’ (τῆς κακίας προστατῶν ὑπάρχοντος), ἀκηδία being the gravest (13.11 = 13.8 = 860C). Again, on another occasion he speaks about eight passions, three out of them being the forerunners of the following five (26.2 = 26.2 = 1013B, also eight evil λογισμοὶ 26.39 = 26.29 = 1021C, 27.42 = 27.2.9 = 1109A and *Ad Past.* 100 = 1205A). This eight-fold scheme undoubtedly goes back to Evagrius, who gives a list of eight evil λογισμοὶ: gluttony, impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, ἀκηδία, vainglory and pride (*Prakt.* 6, cf. *De Oct. Spir. Malit.*). Cassian repeats it, modifying it by placing anger to the fourth place, after avarice (*Conl.* V.II). In the Correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza there is a mention of ‘eight foreign nations’ which are to be defeated (*Corr.* 44).

On one occasion Climacus refers specifically to those who ‘like to distinguish vainglory (κενοδοξία) from pride (ὕπερηφάνια), and to give it a special place and chapter. And so they say that there are eight primary and capital thoughts of evil (τῆς κακίας λογισμούς πρωτεύοντας καὶ ἐπιτρόπους). But Gregory the Theologian and other teachers have given out that there seven; and I am strongly inclined to agree with them’ (22.1 = 21.1 = 948D-949A)<sup>1</sup>. Shortly afterwards Climacus produces a seven-fold scheme in 29.10 = 29.7-13 = 1149AB: gluttony, lust (λαγνεία), avarice, ἄκηδία, anger, vainglory and pride. It is obvious that, again, Climacus reproduces the Evagrian scheme, omitting sadness. It is also apparent in the structure of the *Scala* that Climacus himself distinguishes between vainglory and pride, dedicating separate chapters to each, correspondingly. What causes Climacus to be inconsistent? He provides an answer: passions ‘have no order or reason, but they have every kind of disorder and every kind of chaos (μὴ εἶναι τάξιν, ἢ σύνεσιν ἐν ἀσυνέτοις, πᾶσαν δὲ ἀταξίαν καὶ ἀκαταστασίαν)’ (26.40 = 26.29 = 1021D). By stating this, Climacus not only admits the relativity of any attempts to systematize passions, but also points to their irrational nature, which leads to loss of the equilibrium of the soul and its fragmentation. In this sense Climacus’ definition is reminiscent of the philosophical concepts of passion, which have been discussed above. At the same time, Climacus’ outlook is deeply Christian – passions are the result of the Fall, and signify the loss of the primordial beauty of the soul. Climacus states

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<sup>1</sup> Chrysavgis believes this attribution to be erroneous (most probably relying on Coilleau (*DS* vol.8 col.376), suggesting that Climacus refers to Gregory the Dialogos (*Sources*, p. 10 n. 8, *Ascent*, p. 32 n. 117). However, it is more likely that, as it is indicated in Note III (p. 305) to the Russian translation, Climacus refers to Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Or.* 39.10, where Gregory says that there are seven ‘evil spirits’ (τῆς κακίας πνευμάτων), as well as seven virtues.

clearly: 'Vice or passion is not originally planted in nature, for God is not the creator of passions' (26.67 = 26.41 = 1028A)<sup>1</sup>.

The irrational character of passions has been noted by Mark the Monk: 'Suppose that there are twelve sinful passions (τὰ πάθη τῆς ἀμαρτίας). Indulging in any one of them is equivalent to indulging in them all' (*Leg.* 136). Most probably Climacus does not refer to this particular passage of Mark, when he recalls a 'venerable man', saying to him: 'Suppose that there are twelve shameful passions (τὰ πάθη τῆς ἀτιμίας). If we deliberately love one of them (I mean, pride), it will fill the place of the remaining eleven' (23.5 = 22.6 = 965CD, cf. 26.147 = 26-2.31 = 1065C). Perhaps Climacus alludes to Jam. 2.10, but the appearance of the number 'twelve', which does not come up in the Epistle, is a sign of familiarity with Mark.

In spite of minor differences in the classifications of Evagrius, Cassian and Climacus, we can speak about one and the same scheme with slight varieties. What are the origins and significance of their varying scheme of major sins? If Evagrius was the first writer to articulate the list in a consistent shape, the question of its origins, as well as its popularity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century is particularly difficult. It is interesting, however, that Cassian speaks about the quantity of eight as 'everyone's firm opinion' (*Conl.* V. XVIII.1). Zarin believed that the scheme had emerged gradually to represent the shared ascetic experiences of monks<sup>2</sup>. He also pointed out that implicitly the elements for the scheme were

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'These are all those phenomena within us that we call "passions", which have not been allotted to human nature for any bad purpose at all (for the Creator would most certainly be the author of evil, if in them, so deeply rooted as they are in our nature, any necessities of wrongdoing were found' (*De Anima* 61 A, cf. *Or. Cat.* 6). Cf. Barsanuphius of Gaza: 'God created soul and body without passions, but they have become subject to passions through disobedience' (*Corr.* 246).

<sup>2</sup> С.М. Зарин. *Аскетизм по Православно-Христианскому Учению*. St Petersburg, 1907 (reprinted Moscow 1996). pp. 315, 318.

present in earlier writings: in Clement of Alexandria, the tradition of the *Apophthegmata*, as well as the Scripture itself<sup>1</sup>. Opposing the nineteenth century scholars Zöckler and Schiwietz, Zarin also argues that the origin of the eightfold scheme in Scripture is much more apparent than any origin in stoic ethics or from Plato's scheme of four main virtues of δικαιοσύνη, φρόνησις, σωφροσύνη and ἀνδρεία<sup>2</sup>. Zarin persuasively affirms the Scriptural origin of the scheme, pointing to the number 'eight' in the Gospels as signifying the highest possible degree of the dominion of evil in man (Mt. 12. 45 = Lk. 11.26), as well as to the similarity between the scriptural terminology (διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί (Mt. 15.19), οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοί (Mk. 7.21)) and that of the ascetic tradition<sup>3</sup>. Half a century after Zarin Bloomfield resurrected the discussion of the origins of Evagrius' scheme. He points out to the similarity of the Evagrius' scheme to the list of seven spirits of deceit (τὰ πνεύματα τῆς πλάνης), found in chapters II and III of the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, as well as to other ancient writings, such as Horace' *Epistle to Maecenas* and Egyptian *Corpus Hermeticum*. He claims that 'the seven cardinal sins ... appeared in Christian theology in the fourth century came from a Gnostic Soul Journey'<sup>4</sup>, the number 'seven' deriving from the seven planetary spheres<sup>5</sup>. This theory remains too hypothetical – we simply don't know enough about Evagrius' possible contact with the intellectual circles of Alexandria, where, as Bloomfield points out, belief in the Soul Journey and aerial demons had such adherents as Synesius of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 318-319.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 330-336.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 326.

<sup>4</sup> M.W. Bloomfield. *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Mediaeval English Literature*. Michigan: Michigan State College Press, 1952. p.16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 52.

Cyrene<sup>1</sup>. Evagrius' possible acquaintance with *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* is also under question. We can be more certain that Evagrius' intellectual formation was influenced by the Cappadocians (in whose writings no such concepts as Soul Journey may be found to our knowledge) before his coming to Egypt as an adult man. After all, what made Evagrius' scheme so popular in later generations is its psychological insight in observing the qualities of passions and their interdependence, which is not something he could have inherited from Gnosticism. Thunberg's explanation is more credible. He believes that one of the principles of systematisation was the trichotomy of the soul, although he accepts that this explanation is far from exhaustive. Together with some evidence within Evagrius himself, there is also evidence for this explanation in *Conl.* XXIV.XV, where Cassian explicitly classifies vices (more than eight, but all eight are included) according to the three parts of the soul<sup>2</sup>.

In step 15 Climacus draws a scheme of the origin of passion, which we have mentioned in our discourse on Climacus' anthropology in the context of free will and πρόληψις in Climacus and some earlier writers. Climacus' scheme is six-fold: assault (προσβολή), converse (συνδυασμός), consent (συγκατάθεσις), captivity (αίχμαλωσία), struggle (πάλη) and passion (πάθος) (15.74 = 15.73 = 896D-897B). The six stages explain the gradual inclination of the human soul to sin 'of its own free and proper choice'; he goes on to give a brief explanation for each stage. What were the possible sources of Climacus' scheme?

The author who comes closest to Climacus is Mark the Monk. According to K. Ware, Mark the Monk uses seven key terms to analyse the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Microcosm.* pp. 248-253.

temptation: προσβολή, πρωτόνοια, παραρριπισμός, όμιλία, συνδυασμός, συγκατάθεσις and πρόληψις<sup>1</sup>. Of these seven terms Climacus uses four in his analysis of passion, and, as we shall see, with a similar meaning, and uses πρωτόνοια (26.104 = 26.76 = 1036A), παραρριπισμός (15.75 = 15.73 = 897B) and πρόληψις elsewhere (4.73 = 4.68 = 712A, 5.29 = 5.9 = 777C, 8.11 = 8.13 = 829B, 18.2 = 17.2 = 932B, 26.7 = 26.7 = 1013 C, 26.38 = 26.28 = 1021B, 26.93 = 26.65 = 1033B, 26.15 = 26.3.6 = 1085A). Thus, K. Ware concludes that Climacus reproduces Mark's analysis of temptation *in toto*<sup>2</sup>.

Let us have a closer look at Mark the Monk, following the analysis of K. Ware. Προσβολή in Mark the Monk is the first stage in the process. Its source is demonic (*Bapt.* XI.17, *Justif.* 135), and, imposed by the devil, it is not culpable (ἀναγκαστική *Bapt.* XI.80, ἀναίτιος *Leg.* 142, also *Bapt.* III.66-68, XIII.6-7, *Consult.* II).

Όμιλία is distinct from προσβολή (*Justif.* 211), marking human responsibility (*Bapt.* III.66-68, XI.82).

As far as συνδυασμός is concerned, K. Ware writes: 'It is not absolutely clear from Mark's usage whether this is simply an equivalent to 'consent' (συγκατάθεσις), or represents a distinct stage: on the whole the latter is more probable'<sup>3</sup>. It certainly goes further than προσβολή, signifying our coupling with it (*Paen.* XII.27, *Bapt.* IV.126, V.22).

Συγκατάθεσις, in its turn, signifies our definite approval (*Leg.* 93, *Nic.* I.30, III.10, IV.46, *Causid.* IV.26).

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<sup>1</sup> *Mark.* p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 297-299.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 272.



Following his analysis of passion, Climacus writes: ‘Among the more precise and discerning Fathers, there is mention of a still more subtle notion, something which some of them call a flick of the mind (παραρριπισμός). This is its characteristic: without passage of time, without word or image, it instantaneously introduces the passion to the victim. There is nothing swifter or more discernible among spirits. It manifests itself in the soul by a simple remembrance, which is instantaneous, independent, inapprehensible, and, in some cases, even unknown to the person himself’ (15.75 = 15.73 = 897B). This passage betrays the obvious dependence of Climacus from Mark, who had in fact introduced the term (*Nic.* VII.29-30).

Some of Mark’s terminology may go back to Evagrius. As K. Ware points out, ‘the terms προσβάλλειν, πρωτόνοια, προσομιλεῖν, ἐγχρονίζειν and συγκατάθεσις are all found in Evagrius, in the same context and with the same meaning as in Mark’<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, Evagrius also speaks about ἡ τῶν λογισμῶν αἰχμαλωσία (*Ad. Eulog.* 16, 20)

When we turn back to Origen, we find none of the complexity of Mark, still less that of Climacus. However, he describes a similar process of inclining to passion (or desisting it): ‘if anyone should say that the impression from without is of such a sort that it is impossible to resist it whatever it may be, let him turn his attention to his own feeling and movements (πάθεσι καὶ κινήμασιν) and see whether there is not an approval, assent or inclination (εὐδόκησις ... καὶ συγκατάθεσις καὶ ῥοπή) of the controlling faculty (τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ)’ (*De Princ.* 3.1.4). Thus, Origen affirms human freedom in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p.287.

resisting temptation, and identifies συγκατάθεσις as the moment of free inclination to sin, using the term in the same way as Mark and Climacus do.

Turning to the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, we can see that they also distinguish between the different stages of the origin of passion, e.g. the λογισμός and αἰχμαλωσία (86, cf. 172, 197, 229, 241, 277, 327, 445, 446, 532, 613), λογισμός and συγκατάθεσις (256, 432), but no systematic pattern is envisaged.

With regard to the possible origins of Climacus' scheme, we must mention another treatise *De Uirtutibus et Passionibus*, formerly attributed to Ephrem the Syrian, but now recognized to be spurious. The author of the treatise distinguishes various stages of acceptance of λογισμός: προσβολή, συνδυασμός (=ὁμιλία), πάθος, πάλη, συγκατάθεσις, ἐνέργεια (=πρᾶξις) and αἰχμαλωσία (401.7 – 402.8). Although the terminology is strikingly similar to that of Climacus, there are significant differences. For example, αἰχμαλωσία signifies an aspect of conceived passion, characterized by the paralysis of will, and πάλη follows πάθος. It is impossible to say anything definite about the possible influence of this treatise upon Climacus simply because we do not know much about it. It is certainly not by Ephrem the Syrian, and no corresponding Syriac text has ever been identified, so it was probably written in Greek. It was translated into Georgian via Arabic by about the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which gives the treatise a *terminus ante quem*<sup>1</sup>. Thus, although we cannot be even sure about possible influence either way, we must point to the treatise as being the closest example in ancient spiritual tradition to the scheme of Climacus.

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Dr Sebastian Brock for this information.

The consequence of sin and the work of demons is that the human picture of God and the world is distorted; so that things are not seen as they are in reality. The illusion of ἀκηδία is that ‘it accuses God of being merciless and without love for men’ (13.2 = 13.1 = 860A), while, in fact, ‘nothing equals or expels God’s mercies’ (5.38 = 5.23 = 720B). This idea is repeated by Climacus a number of times: ‘Before our fall, the demons say that God is a friend of man; but after the fall, that He is inexorable’ (5.31 = 5.13 = 777D – 780A, cf. 6.10 = 6.11 = 796A, 7.62 = 7.62 = 816A, 15.33-34 = 15.31 = 888AB, 26.171 = 26-2.53 = 1072B). This is something that Evagrius describes as well: demons either exalt our labours to tempt us by pride, or disparage them in order to lead us to despair (*Ad Eulog.* 28-29).

We have noted a close resemblance between the schemes of the major sins, suggested by Evagrius and Climacus, but there are also similarities in their perception of passion: the passionate λογισμοί distort the vision of the monk, presenting an *illusory* picture of the world. In Evagrius, λογισμοί suggest *unreal* concerns in order to distract a monk from prayer. For example, the temptation of the demon of gluttony is not as much in over-eating, but in making one imagine possible illnesses, caused by asceticism (*Prakt.* 7). Likewise, the demon of avarice would suggest the concern with the non-existent problem of old age and inability to perform manual labour (*Ibid.* 9). Even πορνεία and anger, which would normally imply another person to be present, are about the *imaginary* presence of the object of sexual desire or anger (*Ibid.* 8, 11). Climacus’ perspective is similar when he, for example, speaks about demons suggesting excessive care for the future and concern for the health of the body (1.24 = 1.45 = 641C), defining fear as the ‘rehearsing of danger beforehand’ (21.3 = 21.3 =

945B), or the temptation to express anger as if its object is present (8.18 = 8.20 = 832A). The similarity with Evagrius is particularly clear in the example of ἄκηδία, the noonday demon, introduced to monastic literature by Evagrius. Ἄκηδία, according to Climacus, presents to a monk a picture of the world, which is totally perverted: ‘It calls those who are in the world blessed. It accuses God of being merciless and without love for men’ (13.2 = 13.1 = 860A). It is most striking that the delusion embraces the body as well as the soul: ‘At the third hour, the demon of ἄκηδία produces shivering, headache and even colic. At the ninth hour, the sick man gathers his strength. And when the table is laid, he jumps out of bed. But the hour of prayer has come; again the body is weighed down. He had begun to pray, but it steeps him in sleep, and snatches the verse from his mouth with untimely yawns’ (13.8 = 13.5 = 860BC). ‘If you sit, it will suggest you to lean back; and it urges you to lean against the wall of the cell; then it persuades you to peep out of the window, by producing noises and footsteps’ (13.13 = 13.9 = 860CD). We can see that in this instance ἄκηδία is not only bodily *illusion*, but also the bodily *suffering* – the etymology of πάθος is fully justified.

Besides demonstrating sharp psychological insight, the outlook, shared by Evagrius and Climacus, has a more theoretical perspective. A monk finds himself in a specific situation: while demons struggle with people in the world by means of deeds, with monks he struggles by means of thoughts (*Prakt.* 48). Λογισμοὶ may have a broad meaning here: a demonic temptation, but also a thought in a modern sense of the word – as we saw above, the beginning of passion is an attempt to find a rational motivation for it. While Climacus shares this perspective, in his chapter on gluttony he seems to adopt a view, similar to

that of Cassian, who thought that gluttony and fornication sometimes arise ‘without any provocation from the mind but solely due to the instigation and itching of the flesh’ (*Conl.* V.IV.1). While Climacus usually links the temptation of fornication with gluttony (14.12 = 14.9 = 865C, 14.5 = 14.3 = 864C, 26.s6 = 26-3.2 = 1084C), he knows that a monk who has no or few external incentives for the passion of πορνεία can be attacked not by means of what is natural (κατὰ φύσιν), but by what is not (παρὰ φύσιν) (15.29 = 15.26 = 885B).

Climacus also has a perspective of passion, which may *disguise* itself as a virtue: such passions as hypocrisy (ὑπόκρισις), vice (πονηρία), melancholy (λύπη), the remembrance of injuries (μνησικακία) and disparagement of others (καταλαλιά) in one’s heart are often disguised in the form of good intentions; ‘they appear to propose one thing but have something else in view’ (10.3 = 10.2 = 845B). Thus, slander is called ‘simulation of love’ (ἀγάπης ὑπόκρισις) (10.2 = 10.1 = 845C), because those who slander excuse themselves by claiming to do so out of love and care for the person they slander (10.4 = 10.3 = 845CD). Likewise, those who lie often do so under the pretext of prudence (12.11 = 12.7 = 856C), and gluttony is excused by the pretext of hospitality (14.8 = 14.4 = 864D). Vainglory may induce hospitality and greater effort in psalmody (22.22 = 21.18 = 952C). Even prayer and fasting may be agitated by vainglory, and thus be futile (22.7 = 21.6 = 949C)<sup>1</sup>. The spiritual guidance of women (15.64 = 15.64 = 894 BC) or prayer for a woman (15.50 = 15.46 = 889C) can be agitated by the demon of fornication. The pretext of collecting money for almsgiving may be behind avarice (16.8 = 16.8 = 924D, cf. Basil the Great *Ep.* 42.). Desire to do

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mark the Monk *Leg.* 170: ‘It can happen that someone may in appearance be fulfilling a commandment but is in reality serving a passion, and through evil thoughts he destroys the goodness of the action.’

manual labour in order to earn money for almsgiving and even an intention to visit the sick in accordance with the commandment of the Saviour (Mt. 25.36) may in fact be provoked by ἄκηδία (13.6 = 13.4 = 860AB). A monk may be tempted to go back into the world, on the pretext of saving the perishing souls (22.20 = 21.16 = 952B).

Thus, speaking in modern language, passions for Climacus signify the world of delusion: One of the main characteristics of passion is that even once the evil desire is achieved, the person remains unsatisfied (29.10 = 29.7-9 = 1149A). For example, vainglory is defined as ‘unbounded desire for praise’ (ἔφρεσις εὐφημίας ἀπέραντος) (8.2 = 8.2 = 823C). This is even more the case with the bodily passions, such as gluttony. A devil ‘settles in the belly and does not let the man to be satisfied, even though he has devoured a whole Egypt and drunk a River Nile’ (14.27 = 14.24 = 868C, cf. 14.2 = 14.2 = 864C). Πορνεία is characterized as ‘perpetual drunkenness with desire for creatures, rational and irrational’, so that ‘if the days of this spirit were not cut short, not a soul would be saved, clothed as it is in this clay, mingled with blood and foul moisture’ (15.27 = 15.23 = 884C).

The irrational character of passions may cause confusion (ἄκαταστασία) (26.151 = 26-2.35 = 1065D) between them, and so they can suppress each other. Climacus writes: ‘I have seen hatred break the bond of long-standing fornication, and afterwards remembrance of wrongs, in an amazing way, did not allow the severed union to be renewed’ (9.7 = 9.6 = 841B). The demon of vainglory may prevent from falling asleep during the church office (20.17 = 19.10 = 941B), or from being harsh with another monk in the presence of visitors (22.27 = 21.20 = 952D-953A). Climacus describes how on one occasion he was tempted to leave

his cell, when people came and started praising him for being a ἡσυχαστής, and at once the λογισμός of slackness gave place to the λογισμός of vainglory (27.44 = 27-2.10 = 1109AB). Such passions as vainglory and gluttony oppose each other, and a wise monk uses this enmity to be liberated from both (14.9 = 14.5 = 864D–865A). Otherwise Climacus recommends struggling with one passion at a time (15.41 = 15.39 = 888CD). The method of using the opposition of the two passions against each other, which Climacus recommends in regards to gluttony and vanity, most likely goes back to Evagrius. Evagrius, though, applied it only to vainglory and πορνεία, and recommended it only to those approaching ἀπάθεια (*Prakt.* 58).

However, even though Climacus' view of passions is essentially negative, he does not view them as intrinsically evil. They are natural impulses, distorted by human misbehaviour.

‘Those who say that certain passions are natural to the soul (φυσικὰ εἶναι τινὰ τῶν παθῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ) have been deceived, not knowing that we have turned the constituent qualities of nature (τὰ συστατικὰ τῆς φύσεως ιδιώματα) into passions. For instance, nature gives us seed for childbearing, but we have perverted this into fornication. Nature provides us with the means of showing anger (θυμός) against the serpent, but we have used this against our neighbour. Nature inspires us with zeal to make us compete for the virtues but we compete in evil. It is natural for the soul to desire glory, but the glory on high. It is natural to be overbearing, but against the demons. Joy is also natural to us, but as a joy on account of the Lord and the welfare of our neighbour. Nature has also given us resentment, but to be used against the enemies of the soul. We have received a desire for pleasure, and not for

profligacy' (26.156 = 26-2.41 = 1068 CD). Together with the other indications of Climacus' familiarity with the writings of Abba Isaiah, it must be said that this passage is remarkably similar to Isaiah's exposition (*Ascet.* 2. 1-2)<sup>1</sup>. The same position is expressed by Climacus' contemporaries - Isaac the Syrian and Maximus the Confessor. Isaac thought that 'every passion that exists for our benefit has been given by God. The passions of the body have been implanted in it for its benefit and growth, and the same is true with respect to the passions of the soul.' It is the loss of equilibrium between body and soul, which leads to the emergence of sinful passion (*Hom.* 3). Maximus the Confessor had a similar view of passion – it is the misuse (παράχρησις) of natural impulses which originates and constitutes passion (*Cap. Carit.* II.15-17, 33, 75, III.3-4, 86, IV.14).

In the passage above Climacus mentions that anger can be used in the struggle with demons. To illustrate this, on another occasion Climacus draws a picture of a dog which, 'bitten by a wild beast, becomes all the more furious against it, and is driven to implacable fury by the pain of the wound' (5.36 = 5.20 = 780B). Although usually unready for a compromise with a passion, Climacus makes an exception for anger: people who express their anger at their neighbour are in a better position than those who accumulate it within themselves. In the first case, both repentance of the offender or explanation of grievance may be a result, and so 'passion is defeated by passion'. Such usage of passion, according to Climacus, is, 'though illegitimate (νόθον), is nevertheless useful (ὠφέλιμον)' (8.15 = 8.17 = 829C).

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<sup>1</sup> It is quoted in full in K. Ware. *The Meaning of "Pathos" in Abba Isaias and Theodoret of Cyrus*. In: SP 20. Leuven, Peeters Press, 1989. p. 319.



The image of the dog to describe anger (θυμὸς) appears in Basil the Great, although somewhat differently: it must follow the reason as a dog follows the shepherd. Anger provides the soul with vigour for accomplishment of virtues, and can restore it from the state of paralysis (*Hom. Adv. eos qui Irasc.* 5, PG 31 365 AC). The same idea occurs later in Gregory of Nyssa: 'Anger and rage and hatred should be aroused, like dogs, guarding gates, only for resistance to sin ... The impulse toward more which lies without limit in the soul of each person should be applied to the desire for God, and thus one will be congratulated for his greed, since he is using force where force is praiseworthy' (*De Virg.* XVIII = GNO VIII.I 318,11-13, 318.26-319.4). According to Evagrius, 'Anger (φύσις θυμοῦ) is given to us so that we may fight against the demons and strive against every pleasure' (*Prakt.* 24). Both Abba Isaiah (*Ascet.* 2.2) and Evagrius speak about hatred (μῖσος) in positive terms; for Evagrius, the sign of complete dispassion is 'perfect hatred' (τέλειον μῖσος) towards demons (*De Mal. Cog.* 10). In case of temptation he even recommends not to pray immediately, but first to utter some angry words (τινα ῥήματα μετ' ὀργῆς) against the demon (*Prakt.* 42). While Barsanuphius of Gaza also thought that hatred against evil is God-given (*Corr.* 97), John Cassian recommended becoming angry not only against external temptations, but also about our own shortcomings and faults (*Inst.* VIII. VII-IX).

If we say that passions are deformed virtuous impulses, it means that once a certain passion is overcome, the corresponding virtue is achieved (13.9 = 13.6 = 860C), which is what Climacus affirms throughout the *Scala*. In this respect he is quite similar to Dorotheos of Gaza (*Instr.* XI. 113, XII. 133). Dorotheos, however, gives a theological justification for his affirmation: the opposition of

virtue and vice is not simply that between what is good and what is evil, but between what is good and its absence: ‘Evil in itself is nothing, for it has no being or substance (Ἡ κακία καθ’ ἑαυτὴν οὐδέν ἐστιν · οὔτε γὰρ οὐσία τίς ἐστιν, οὔτε ὑπόστασιν τίνα ἔχει)... So also wickedness is a sickness of soul depriving it of its own natural health, which is a state of virtue’ (*Ibid.* X. 106, cf. XII. 134, cf. *Diadochus Cap. Gnost.* 3). Most likely Dorotheos owes his expression to Gregory of Nyssa, who defined vice (κακία) as ‘absence of virtue’ (*Or. Cat.* 5), which does not have an existence (ὑπόστασις) of its own (*Ibid.* 6)<sup>1</sup>. According to Gregory, ‘as long as the good is present in the nature, vice is a thing that has no inherent existence (ἀνυπαρκτόν τί ἐστι καθ’ ἑαυτὴν ἢ κακία); while the departure of the better state becomes the origin of its opposite’ (*Or. Cat.* 5). Gregory, in his turn, echoes Athanasius of Alexandria, who expressed similar outlook in *Contra Gentes* 4-7. One could say that there is a Platonic outlook behind these writers, which would imply the identity of the Good and the Being, but it seems to us that the essential standpoint is deeply Christian: if man was created in the Image of God without blemish, and passions are the distortions of the soul’s nature, their healing signifies the recovery of the soul’s natural properties – virtues.

### **Ἀπάθεια**

Following varying definitions of πάθος, various philosophical traditions suggested different ideals – expressed either in terms of ἀπάθεια or μετριοπάθεια. In Peters’ summary, ‘the Stoic is concerned with eradicating the *pathe*, the Peripatetic with moderating them, and the Epicurean with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *De Virg.* 12 = GNO VIII.I. 299. 12-14: ‘Evil outside of choice and by itself does not exist in the nature of things’ (ἐν τῇ φύσει τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν οὐδέν).

discriminating the good and evil among them'<sup>1</sup>. However, as Rist points out, all of them 'might have found themselves in agreement if they had been able to agree on what πάθος is'<sup>2</sup>.

The term ἀπάθεια occurs in Plato, where it signifies being unaffected by neither pleasure nor pain (*Philebus* 21 e), and it was to become central to the Stoic philosophy. As we saw above, the Stoics viewed πάθη as diseases of the soul; it is therefore understandable why ἀπάθεια was seen as an ideal by them. If passions are what is against nature, ἀπάθεια is nothing else but the natural state of the soul, in which it is obedient to the ἡγεμονικόν, reason. It is interesting that Athanasius, while avoiding the term ἀπάθεια in *Vita Antonii* presents an ideal, quite reminiscent to that of the stoic sage: 'The state of his soul was pure, for it was neither contracted by grief, nor dissipated by pleasure nor pervaded by jollity or dejection. He was not embarrassed when he saw the crowd, nor was he elated at seeing so many there to receive him. No, he had himself completely under control – a man guided by reason (λόγος) and living according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν)' (14). The last section has particularly Stoic overtones - κατὰ φύσιν was the standard Stoic attribute of virtue.

Climacus distinguishes two levels of mastering a passion. 'Freedom from anger in novices is one thing; the immovability (ἀκίνησία) that is found in the perfect is another. In the former, anger is held in by tears as in a bridle; but in the latter it has been mortified by ἀπάθεια, as a snake is killed by a sword' (8.26 = 8.29 = 833B). Likewise, Climacus distinguishes two levels of controlling sexual desire together with the higher level of mortifying it altogether (15.14 = 15.10 =

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<sup>1</sup> Peters, F.E. *Greek Philosophical Terms: a historical lexicon*. NY: New York University Press, 1967. p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Rist. *Philosophy*. p. 26-27.

881BC). The *Apophthegmata*, too, distinguishes two different spiritual levels – of controlling passions and of destroying them (*Alph.* Abraham 1), but both the *Apophthegmata* and Climacus clearly show the latter to be superior to the former<sup>1</sup>. Thus, Climacus establishes ἀπάθεια as an ideal.

The fact that ἀπάθεια in the Fathers (as well as in the earlier philosophers) does not mean insensibility or total suppressions has been said so often, that it hardly needs repeating<sup>2</sup>. Neither it does it in Climacus – insensibility is a vice, to which he dedicates the whole of chapter 18. As has been pointed out by Chrysavgis, for Climacus ἀπάθεια means gathering all disorientated impulses, and transforming them into the single impulse of love<sup>3</sup>, to which he dedicates his next and last chapter.

Ἀπάθεια is above all a result of labour (1.24 = 1.43 = 641B). It follows humility, which in its turn follows obedience (4.71 = 4.65 = 709D), and is preceded by πένθος (7.53 = 7.51 = 813A). Climacus stresses the divine collaboration in the attainment of ἀπάθεια: ‘Many have soon obtained forgiveness, but no one has obtained ἀπάθεια quickly; this needs considerable time, and love and longing, and God’ (26.58 = 26.3.49 = 1089C). However, it can be achieved in a few years with the help of humility (25.36 = 25.35 = 997A). It can be achieved in any place (4.97 = 4.98 = 716D), and patience during insults helps to achieve dispassion (4.124 = 4.130 = 728B). Climacus likes to use the image of resurrection for attainment of ἀπάθεια. He uses the image of

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<sup>1</sup> Some parallels in ancient philosophy may be found to this outlook (see Sorabji. *Emotions*. p. 197, 284, 286), as well as in Clement of Alexandria (see A. Méhat, *Etude sur les 'Stromateis' de Clement d'Alexandrie*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966. pp. 361-6 and Lilla. *Clement*. pp. 103-106).

<sup>2</sup> Rist. *Philosophy*. p. 25, F.X. Murphy. *Evagrius Ponticus and Origenism*. In: *Origeniana Tertia. The third International Colloquium for Origen Studies. (University of Manchester September 7th - 11th, 1981)*. Papers edited by Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel. pp. 265-6, D.A. Ousley. *Evagrius' Theology of Prayer and Spiritual Life*. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 2000. p. 223 and *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Chrysavgis. *Ascent*. p. 184.

resurrected Lazarus to illustrate  $\nu\omicron\theta\varsigma$ , which has achieved it (1.6 = 1.13 = 633D). He also uses the Scriptural imagery of Exodus: the struggle with the Amalek of the passions (1.7 = 1.14 = 636A) and reaching Jerusalem, ‘the land of dispassion’ (3.11 = 3.14 = 665B), while the ‘strange land’ of Ps. 136.5 is the land of passions (7.24 = 7.26 = 805D).

Climacus defines  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  as a ‘heaven of the mind within the heart, which regards the wiles of the demons as mere pranks. And so he is pre-eminently dispassionate, and is recognized as dispassionate, who has made his flesh incorruptible, who has raised his mind above creatures and has subdued all his senses to it, and who keeps his soul before the face of the Lord, ever reaching out to Him even beyond his strength. Some say, moreover, that dispassion is the resurrection of the soul before the body; but others, that it is the perfect knowledge of God, second only to that of the angels’ (29.2-4 = 29.1-2 = 1148BC). In this series of definitions, Climacus brings in a number of important themes, which he develops elsewhere.

First of all, it must be said that the terminology of  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  is wholly absent from the Holy Scripture. Thus, by immediately defining  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  as ‘Heaven on earth’ (29.1 = 29.1 = 1148B), the ‘celestial palace of the Heavenly King’ (29.14 = 29.16 = 1149D,) ‘Heaven of the mind within the heart’, Climacus immediately makes the reader recall the ‘Kingdom of heaven’ of the Gospels. The definition of Climacus recalls that of Evagrius, who defined ‘ $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  of the soul’ simply as ‘the Kingdom of heaven’ (*Prakt.* 2).

From the passage above it can be seen that  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  signifies becoming less vulnerable, if not insensitive to temptations. Someone who has attained to  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$  may say: ‘The evil one who dodges me, I have not known (Ps 100.4);

nor how he came, nor why, nor why he went: but I am completely unaware of anything of this kind, because I am wholly united with God, and always will be' (29.10 = 29.14 = 1149C). Rather than invincibility, ἀπάθεια signifies effective defence. In the definition of Diadochus, repeated by Isaac the Syrian (*Hom.* 71), 'ἀπάθεια is not freedom from attack by the demons, but it is to remain undefeated when they attack' (*Cap. Gnost.* 98)

In the chapter on ἀπάθεια Climacus defines purity as ἀπάθεια (29.7 = 29.4 = 1148D), in the chapter on purity referring to 'certain of the Fathers' who defined purity as ἀπάθεια (15.66 = 15.65 = 893D). It seems to us that this unity between purity and ἀπάθεια provides the key to understanding Climacus' doctrine of ἀπάθεια. It becomes particularly clear when we see how different perspectives of Climacus' definition of ἀπάθεια are uncovered in his discourse on purity.

What does ἀπάθεια signify as a mode of relation to other people? Climacus gives the words of Christ 'whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.' (Mt. 12.50) as an example of 'dispassionate hatred' (ἀπαθὲς μῖσος) (3.14 = 3.19 = 665D). Thus, he establishes ἀπάθεια as a norm of monastic attitude to one's relatives. Climacus also stretches the concept of ἀπάθεια to discuss the sexual impulse, or, rather, its elimination. Thus, the highest degree of purity is 'to hold all persons in the same regard as inanimate beings' (29.10 = 29.8 = 1149A). It is clear from the *Scala* that Climacus does not exhort his readers to complete indifference to each other; neither has he wanted them to treat each other as things. Most likely he expresses the traditional monastic ideal, which he expounds in his chapter on purity. Here we see the term 'insensibility' (ἀναίσθησία) as a bodily expression of ἀπάθεια:

‘He is chaste who has continually acquired perfect insensibility to difference in bodies. The rule and limit of absolute and perfect purity is to be equally disposed towards animate and inanimate bodies, rational and irrational’ (15.5-6 = 15.3 = 880D-881A).

‘Truly blessed is he who has acquired perfect insensibility to every body and colour and beauty’ (15.9 = 15.5 = 881A).

Climacus gives an example of such an attitude: ‘A certain man, on seeing a beautiful woman, thereupon glorified the Creator; and from that one look, he was moved to the love of God and to a fountain of tears ... If such a person always feels and behaves in the same way on similar occasions, then he has risen incorruptible (ἄφθαρτος) before the general resurrection’ (15.60 = 15.58 = 892D – 893A). Here Climacus is an heir to the monastic literary tradition, which, besides descriptions of bodily warfare and suggesting means of struggling with it, also described a stage, when the bodily warfare is overcome and a monk is no longer capable of feeling lust. Thus, according to the *Apophthegmata*, a monk, entering his cell, seeing a woman lying on his mat and realizing that it is a woman is not entirely free from the passion of lust (*Alph. Abraham* 1). The *Apophthegmata* provides us with several colourful examples of such inviolability. It describes a woman, who has done a lot for monks, making her house a hospice for them. Eventually she ran out of money and became a prostitute. One of the fathers decided to convince her to repent and to see her on the pretext of committing adultery with her. The narrative describes him entering a room and sitting down on a bed, upon which she was lying. ‘What have you got against Jesus that you behave like this?’ he asks and begins to weep (*Alph. John the Dwarf* 40, cf. *Serapion* 1).

It is significant that in the chapter on ἀγνεία Climacus develops angelic imagery: it means putting on angelic nature (15.1 = 15.2 = 880C, 15.71 = 15.70 = 896C). Similar imagery may be found in Gregory of Nyssa: according to Gregory, by ἀπάθεια soul becomes ἰσάγγελος (*Comm. in Cant. Cant. I* = GNO VI. 30.7-8). He most certainly owes the term ἰσάγγελος to Lk 20.36, where it is linked to resurrection and virginity. Gregory develops the interplay of these themes by bringing them from the sphere of eschatology to that of asceticism: 'For if the life which is promised to the just by the Lord after the resurrection is ἰσάγγελος – and release from marriage is a peculiar characteristic of the angelic nature – he has already received some of the beauties of the promise ... having imitated the purity of the incorporeal beings in the undefiled character of his life' (*De Virg.* 14 = GNO VIII,I. 309.10-15). Thus, we see the unity of concepts – ἀπάθεια, ἰσάγγελος and life of the age to come, and it is easy to recognize the presence of this triad in Climacus initial definition ἀπάθεια (29.2-4 = 29.1-2 = 1148BC quoted above), although the term ἰσάγγελος itself is not used.

The angelic imagery in Climacus in regards to sexuality signifies exactly what it does in Gregory – in J. Daniélou's words, 'absence of everything that accompanies corporeal life'<sup>1</sup>. As we are about to see, in Climacus this 'everything' is not limited by sexuality.

Let us come back to Climacus' initial definition of ἀπάθεια, where he says that the dispassionate man has made his flesh incorruptible (ἄφθαρτος). The theme also finds its place in the chapter on purity: 'The Lord, being incorruptible (ἄφθαρτος) and incorporeal, rejoices in the purity and incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) of our body' (15.35 = 15.32 = 888B). The theme of ἀφθαρσία is

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<sup>1</sup> *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique: Doctrine Spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*. Paris: Aubier, 1944. p. 95.



brought in again in the concluding passage of his discourse on purity, this time in connection with resurrection: 'He who has achieved it (purity), while still living in the flesh, has died and risen, and from now on experiences the taste of future incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) (15.90 = 15.83 = 904C). In the chapter on ἀπάθεια he relates ἀφθαρσία to the body (29.3 = 29.2 = 1148B) and in the final chapter he uses ἄφθαρτος synonymously with ἱσάγγελος and denoting specifically the capacity of the body not to be sick (30.19 = 30.11 = 1157B). We can see that Climacus stretches the concept of ἀφθαρσία as towards both God and human body, thus asserting the *divinisation* of the body. If we want to understand what Climacus means by the term ἀφθαρσία, we need to make a short historical excursus into it. As J. Daniélou notes, Gregory of Nyssa often uses it in connection with ἀπάθεια and purity (καθαρότης), perhaps synonymous with Climacus' ἀγνεία)<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes he speaks about ἀφθαρσία as being the Divine attribute, then extending it to those who are holy (E.g. *De Virg.* 1 = GNO 19-24, *De Anima* 157A – 160C). However, the term ἄφθαρτος had more connotations for Climacus than for Gregory because of the earlier controversy with the so-called apthartodocetists, who believed the body of Christ to be free from the consequences of sin and therefore incorruptible<sup>2</sup>. As John of Damascus makes clear, φθορὰ implies not only ability to corrupt, but also the whole spectrum of the consequences of sin in the life of the body (*Exp. Fid.* III.28 = Kotter 72.2-11). He classified 'hunger, thirst, weariness, labour, the tears, the corruption, the shrinking from death, the fear, the agony with the bloody sweat, the succour at the hands of angels because of the weakness of nature' as 'natural and innocent

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the controversy, see A. Grillmeier. *Christ in Christian Tradition*. London: Mowbrays, 1975 -. Vol. 2 pt. 2. pp. 213-229, Vol 2. pt. 4. pp. 45-52.

passions' (τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ ἀδιόβλητα πάθη<sup>1</sup>), which were accepted by Christ freely, 'for no compulsion is contemplated in him but all is voluntary' (*Ibid.* III.20. = Kotter 64.2-26). After the resurrection Christ became ἄφθαρτος, being liberated from these passions (*Ibid.* III.28 = Kotter 72.23-24). John of Damascus speaks about the first fruits of the resurrection, shared by us, being both ἄφθαρσία and ἀπάθεια (*Ibid.* III.28 = Kotter 72.24-27). Considering his earlier definition of 'natural and sinless πάθη' earlier on, we may suggest that for John of Damascus ἀπάθεια is an ontological, rather than ethical, concept. Moreover, we believe that this is also the case with John Climacus. In the previous chapter we saw his strong belief in the transformation of the human body, which, being free from the consequences of sin, can possess characteristics of the resurrected body. Having become ἄφθαρτος, it possesses an 'angelic state' and overcomes hunger and disease (30.18-19 = 30.11 = 1157B). Now we could see that he links ἀπάθεια it with ἄφθαρσία, which, most likely, had the same connotations for him as for John of Damascus. Thus, the transfiguration of the body in terms of possessing qualities, peculiar to the resurrected body, also belongs to the all-embracing realm of ἀπάθεια.

If our conclusions are correct, Climacus takes the notion of ἀπάθεια much further, than his predecessors, namely, Clement, Evagrius and the Cappadocians. The Apostolic fathers (e.g. Ignatius of Antioch *Eph.* 7.2, *Pol.* 3.2.), Athanasius (who sometimes uses it together with ἄφθαρσία: *De Incarnatione* 26.1, 54.3) and Gregory of Nazianzus (who spoke, for example about the γέννησις of Christ being ἀπαθής, because it is immaterial, while every material birth is ἐμπαθής (*Or.* 29.2,4) apply it to the divinity or to Christ (Gregory often spoke about the

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<sup>1</sup> The term ἀδιόβλητα πάθη actually comes from Julian Halicarnassus. See Grillmeier. *Christ*. Vol. 2. pt 4. p. 50.

‘passions of the Dispassionate’ (*Or.* 17.12, 26.13, 30.5, 39.13, 40.45 cf. Macarius of Egypt *Serm.* 3.1,2 (*Sermones* 1-22, 24-27)). Justin Martyr spoke about ἀπάθεια (and ἀφθαρσία) of ‘the worthy’ (*Apol.* 10.2, 58.3, 2 *Apol.* 1.2, *Dial.* 45.4, 46.7) not only in eschatological terms, but also as categories of pre-Fallen human nature (*Dial.* 124.4). Clement of Alexandria, however, was the first to introduce ἀπάθεια into Christian ethics as a central term. He presents the ideal of a Gnostic, who, following the ideal of God, has no affections: he does not even ‘love anyone with this common affection (οὐδὲ ἄρα φιλεῖ τινὰ τὴν κοινὴν ταύτην φιλίαν), but loves (ἀγαπᾷ) the Creator in the creatures’ (*Strom.* 6.9.71-72). As Sorabji pointed out, Clement goes as far as to abandon the Stoic notion of εὐπάθεια<sup>1</sup>. After Clement, the term was to become fundamental to Evagrius. He called ἀπάθεια ‘the health of the soul’ (*Prakt.* 56), and, as with the Stoics, it designated a solid emotional stability: ‘The soul which has ἀπάθεια is not simply the one which is not disturbed by the events (τὰ πράγματα) but the one which remains unmoved at the memory of them at all’ (*Prakt.* 67, also 64). The specific sign of ἀπάθεια is the ability of νοῦς to see its own light (*Prakt.* 64, *Gnost.* 45, *De Mal. Cog.* 24). Although there are no traces in Climacus of the last phenomenon, there are some significant parallels between Evagrius and Climacus. The most obvious one is a close parallel between ἀπάθεια and ἀγάπη, which both authors make. Evagrius speaks about ἀγάπη as a child of ἀπάθεια (*Prakt.* Prol, 81, *Ad Mon.* 67). Climacus also places the chapter on ἀγάπη directly after the chapter on ἀπάθεια, distinguishing the two only by name (30.9 = 30.4 = 1156B). For Climacus, as we saw, it signifies a certain inviolability to demonic attacks. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Emotions.* p. 387.

same idea is found in Evagrius: the ‘perfect ἀπάθεια is born in the soul after the victory over all demons whose function it is to offer opposition to πρακτική’ (*Prakt.* 60, cf. Diadochus *Cap. Gnost.* 98). According to Evagrius, those in a state of ἀπάθεια no longer experience demonic fantasies in sleep (*De Mal. Cog.* 4). Climacus, in his turn, also believes that the sign of true purity is to be unmoved during sleep (15.13 = 15.9 = 881B). Thus, we can see that although Evagrius does not read into the term ἀπάθεια as much as Climacus does, there is a certain unity of perception between them.

Before passing on to conclusions, another interesting aspect of ἀπάθεια must be mentioned - the possibility to feign passions. Later on, we will see that Climacus believes it to be possible to deceive the demons. The same method of imitating passions can be used to deceive people in order to achieve greater humility (25.44 = 25.40 = 997BC)<sup>1</sup> – the latter become fundamental to the tradition of ‘fools in Christ’. Passions can also be imitated in front of those under his authority (4.27 = 4.24 = 692CD, *Ad Past.* 18 = 1173A). The latter case relates particularly to anger. Climacus warns about the danger of this practice and insists on the sufficient degree of spiritual progress, necessary for it, in the later example defining it as ἀπάθεια.

### **Conclusion**

It may not be easy for a modern reader to see dispassion as an ideal of the inner state. The term is easily misunderstood. Perhaps we may find some consolation in the fact that it was misunderstood even in antiquity. We know

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<sup>1</sup> Climacus refers to examples of such behaviour in *Apophthegmata* (*Alph.* Simon 2), Palladius *Historia Lausiaca* 37.16. Palladius sees such behaviour as a proof of ἀπάθεια.

from Aulus Gellius that the notion of ἀπάθεια could be equated to ἀναλγησία, and, as such, disapproved of (*Noctium Atticarum* XII.V.10).

It is easy to see the possible philosophic origins of the term, initially non-existent in the Christian vocabulary, but perhaps we may speak not about external influence, but (to some extent) about the same message, shared both by the philosophers and of the Fathers. For example, it is doubtful that any of the Fathers (except, perhaps, Clement), would disagree with the ideal of Marcus Aurelius 'never to give the impression of anger or of any other passion, but to be at once entirely passionless and yet full of natural affection (ἅμα μὲν ἀπαθέστατον εἶναι, ἅμα δὲ φιλοστοργότατον) (*Med.* 1.9). The Fathers urge us to use to their full potential of all the gifts, bestowed upon man by the Creator, emotional life being no exception. An interesting early example of such an outlook may be found in Lactantius. Accusing the Stoics of madness on pretext of their doctrine of ἀπάθεια (but at the same time accepting their formula that affections become vicious only if they are in excess!), he compares the emotional life of man to the earth, which was given to Adam to be cultivated to bring forth good fruit (*Div. Inst.* VI. 15). Therefore, we should not be surprised when we encounter such expressions as 'fire of ἀπάθεια' (*Diadochus Cap. Gnost.* 17). Even understanding ἀπάθεια as emotional stability has certain limitations: 'Do not say that a dispassionate man cannot suffer affliction; for even if he does not suffer on his own account, he is under a liability to do so for his own neighbour' (Mark the Monk *Justif.* 123).

Comparing the views of the philosophers and of the Fathers, we can see their indebtedness to the pre-Christian heritage. However, the essential patristic standpoints in regards to passions and emotional life are Christian:



1. Man was created in the image of God, free from stain and extremely beautiful.
2. As a result of the Fall, the emotional and bodily life became disorganised and passions came into being.
3. It is possible and necessary to bring inner life into order by controlling emotions and directing them towards good purposes, in accordance to God's initial idea of man.

## ***PRAYER***

### ***Introduction***

As we have said earlier, the fact that Climacus places the chapter on prayer towards the end of the book does not mean that he does not expect his readers to pray at an earlier stage. He does so because for him prayer in a full sense of the word is a state rather than an activity. As such, prayer originates as a result of an established loving and personal relationship with God, and is preceded by a preliminary period of *ascesis*. Being a union (ἔνωσις) with God (28.1 = 28.1 = 1129A), it requires effort to conform oneself to the One with whom a man is to be united. 'If we wish to stand before our King and God and converse with Him we must not rush into this without preparation' (28.3 = 28.3 = 1129C), writes Climacus, and the whole of *πρακτική* is essentially about this preparation.

What does Climacus usually mean by the word "prayer"? He does not discuss liturgical prayer (except for few passing references: 18.5 = 17.5 = 933C, 23.39 = 23.2 = 976C, 28.52 = 28.52 = 1137C). Typically for a monastic writer, he distinguishes it from psalmody (4.8 = 4.10 = 681A, 4.91 = 4.87 = 713D, 20.2 = 19.1 = 940C, 27.33 = 27-2.3 = 1105C, 27.77 = 27-2.47 = 1116C, cf. Evagrius *Prakt.* 69, *De Or.* 83, 85, *Apophthegmata Alph.* Epiphanius 3, John the Dwarf 35,

Palladius *Historia Lausiaca* 43.2). Climacus gives the following definition of prayer: ‘Prayer, by reason of its nature, is the converse and union (συνουσία καὶ ἔνωσις) of man with God’ (28.1 = 28.1 = 1129A). It is interesting that in this definition Climacus prefers συνουσία, which has sexual connotations, to the Evagrian ὁμιλία (*De Or.* 3). However, Evagrius and Climacus should not be opposed to each other: Climacus uses the term συνομιλέω to describe prayer (11.5 = 11.4 = 852C), while Evagrius, in his turn, uses συνουσία to describe union with God (*De Or.* 34, 107). Nevertheless, Climacus’ definition is worth noting and we shall return to it in our discussion of ἔρωσ in the *Scala*.

Climacus suggests the following order of prayer: ‘Before all else, let us list sincere thanksgiving first on the scroll of our prayer. On the second line, we should put confession and heartfelt contrition of the soul. Then let us present our petition to the King of all.’ (28.7 = 28.6 = 1132A). By making thanksgiving as the foundation of prayer Climacus changes the order suggested by Cassian. Like Origen (*De Orat.* 14.), Cassian in his discourse on prayer relied on 1 Tim 2.1: ‘First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made’. Cassian believed that the order of these is by no means accidental (*Conl.* IX.IX.1), although he also believed that all four can be combined in one single prayer, as Christ did in Jn. 17 (*Ibid.* IX.XVII.3). However, he also places thanksgiving on the top of the spiritual summit (*Ibid.* IX.XIV,XV.1).

Why does Climacus make thanksgiving the foundation of prayer? As we have said in the introduction, it is not through labours that one attains salvation but primarily through Divine love and mercy. To understand this means to

become more and more humble before God, and therefore gratitude becomes the most vital aspect of the relationship between God and man. If a man retains such an attitude, his relationship with God becomes eucharistic in the original sense of the word.

Looking at earlier authors, we can see similar attitudes. Gratitude corresponds to sonship (Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 619) or friendship (Dorotheos *Instr.* XIII.139) with God. Mark the Monk suggested that his disciple place gratitude at the beginning of his spiritual life. One should ‘continually and unceasingly’ bring to mind all the blessings of the Lord: deliverance from dangers, God’s faithfulness to us in spite of our unfaithfulness to Him, his guidance of our soul to salvation. ‘If a man always thinks in this way’, writes Mark, ‘and does not forget God’s blessings, he encourages and urges himself on to the practice of every virtue and of every righteous work, always ready, always eager to do the will of God’ (*Nic.* 2. 48-52).

Climacus believes that the reason why we do not receive what we ask from God is precisely our ungratefulness: ‘Our good Redeemer attracts to His love those who are grateful by the quick satisfaction of our petitions. But he makes ungrateful souls remain in prayer before Him for a long time, in hunger and thirst for their petition; for an ill conditioned cur, when once it gets its bread, makes off with it and leaves the giver. Do not say, after a spending a long time in prayer, that nothing has been gained; for you have already gained something. And what higher good is there than to cling to the Lord and persevere in unceasing union with Him?’ (28.28-29 = 28.22-23 = 1133D – 1136A). The last saying is almost a quotation from Evagrius: ‘For what greater thing is there than to converse intimately with God and to be preoccupied with his company?’ (*De Or.* 34).



Evagrius, however, gives a different reason why our prayers are not answered by God: we simply ask for the wrong things. 'Many times while I was at prayer, I would keep asking for what seemed good to me. I kept insisting on my own request, unreasonably putting pressure on the will of God. I simply would not leave it up to His Providence to arrange what he knew would turn out for my profit. Finally, when I obtained my request I became greatly chagrined at having been so stubborn about getting my own way, for in the end the matter did not turn out to be what I had fancied it would' (*De Or.* 32). Thus, 'the Lord wishes to confer greater favours than those you ask for, in reward for your perseverance in praying to Him' (*Ibid.* 34).

In another passage Climacus offers a few other explanations as to why those who ask do not obtain their requests from God: 'because they ask at the wrong time, or because they ask unworthily and vaingloriously, or because if they received they would become conceited, or finally because they would become negligent after obtaining their request' (26.60 = 26.38 = 1025C). Isaac the Syrian suggests a similar explanation: 'If you should beseech God for a thing and He is slow to hearken to you speedily, do not grieve, for you are not wiser than God. This happens to you either because you are not worthy to obtain your request, or because the pathways of your heart do not accord with your petitions (or rather the contrary), or because you have not yet reached the measure wherein you could receive the gift you ask for. We must not rush onwards to great measures before the time, lest God's gift may be debased by our hasty reception of it. For anything that is quickly obtained is also easily lost, whereas everything found with toil is also kept with careful watching' (*Hom.* 3). Thus, both writers

reconcile the promise of Christ to fulfil our requests (Jn. 14. 13-14) and the fact that not all requests are obtained.

Climacus ascribes a cosmic dimension to prayer, stating that it upholds the world (κόσμου σύστασις) (28.1 = 28.1 = 1129A). It is interesting that this understanding of prayer emerged as early as in the mid-second century. Aristides wrote: 'I do not hesitate to say that the world continues to exist only because of the prayers of supplications of the Christians' (*Apol.* 16). Likewise, the author of the *Historia Monachorum* had no doubts that through the prayers of the monks he describes 'the world is kept in being' (ἔστηκεν ὁ κόσμος) (*prol.* 9).

Sometimes Climacus distinguishes between different degrees of prayer (27.21 = 27.20 = 1100AB, 28.19 = 28.20 = 1132D). He also gives different names to its higher degrees, speaking about 'inner' (ἄυλος) (19.6 = 18.937D), 'true' (ἀληθής) (27.21 = 27.20 = 1100AB), 'earnest' (ἄοκνος) (27.46 = 27-2.12 = 1109B) and 'genuine' (ἐναργής) (28.16 = 28.15 = 1132C) prayer. However, he does not clarify these definitions and thus makes no systematic exposition of prayer. Neither does he have a clear anthropology of prayer, like Evagrius. Sometimes he describes prayer as activity of νοῦς (e.g. 27.21 = 27.20 = 1100A), describing prayer as ἐργασία νοῦς (20.10 = 19.7 = 941A, cf. 19.6 = 18.5 = 937D). Sometimes he describes prayer in terms of καρδία, speaking about 'true prayer of the heart' (15.81 = 15.76 = 900C) or inviolable activity of the heart (ἐργασία καρδίας ἄσυλος) (27.46 = 27-2.12 = 1109B). Climacus is not attempting to present a systematic account of prayer - he believes that 'prayer has a Teacher of its own - God - that teaches man knowledge, and grants the prayer of him who prays' (28.64 = 28.63 = 1140C).

### *Prayer and the remembrance of death*

We are now going to look at the notion of μνήμη θανάτου and its connection with prayer. It is relevant to discuss this subject in this chapter because for Climacus they are very closely associated. ‘Some say that prayer is better than remembrance of death, but I praise two natures in one person’ (28.46 = 28.48 = 1137A), he affirms, using a classical Chalcedonian Christological formula. While defining prayer as ‘estrangement (ἄλλοτριώσις) from the world, visible and invisible’ (28.25 = 28.28 = 1133C), he asserts that ‘a true sign of those who are mindful of death in the depth of their being is a voluntary detachment (ἀπροσπάθεια) from every creature’ (6.6 = 6.8 = 793C, cf. 6.21 = 6.23 = 797B).

The association of μνήμη θανάτου and prayer is also clear in Climacus’ instruction for both to be continuous. ‘Acquire an inseparable wife – the remembrance of death’, exhorts Climacus (3.15 = 3.19 = 665D, cf. 6.11 = 6.12 = 796A). Remembrance of death and eternal judgment is said by Climacus to be an ‘incessant and ceaseless’ topic of conversations between monks in a monastery which Climacus had visited (4.15 = 4.16 = 685B). ‘Unbroken remembrance of death’ is listed together with ‘uninterrupted prayer’ (4.118 = 4.119 = 725B). Like prayer, remembrance of death should not cease even during one’s sleep: ‘The monk is a mourning soul that both asleep and awake is unceasingly occupied with the remembrance of death’ (1.4 = 1.10 = 633C).’

It is interesting, that, while correlating prayer and remembrance of death, Climacus brings in the theme of ecstasy in both respective chapters (6 and 28). In ch. 6 Climacus describes a monk who ‘went into ecstasy (ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐννοίας ἐξίστατο), at the thought of death; and the brothers

who found him would lift him and carry him off scarcely breathing, like one had fainted or had an epileptic fit' (6.17 = 6.19 = 796C). Immediately afterwards, Climacus tells the story of Hesychius the Horebite, who, having once become ill, 'for an hour left his body'. This experience Climacus describes as ἔκστασις, and after it Hesychius spent twelve years in solitude in silence and eating only bread and water, always remaining in the state of meditation on his experience, and 'was always as if out of his mind (ἔκνους)' (6.18 = 6.20 = 796C – 797A). As we shall see later on, Climacus' usage of the term ἔκστασις in these passages is somewhat different than in his discourses on prayer: here it has a less technical meaning, rather attempting to describe a certain degree of freedom of soul from body. Nevertheless, we believe that the recurrence of this notion in both chapters emphasises the association of prayer and μνήμη θανάτου.

N. Sakharov identifies three main theses in patristic thought on mindfulness of death. 'Firstly, the ascetic practice of concentrating on the fact of death is designed to provoke more effective renunciation of the world by setting the present life into eternal perspective ... Secondly, the fear of punishment serves as an effective deterrent from sin ... Thirdly, anticipation of eschatological rewards stimulates aspiration after ascetic endeavour.'<sup>1</sup> While Climacus somewhat neglects the third notion (except 13.15 = 13.10 = 860D), he uses every possibility to use fear of death as a deterrent. While demons inflame novices with memories of their relatives, Climacus suggests quenching this 'untimely fire of heart' with memory of eternal fire (2.10 = 2.16 = 657B). Sloth during psalmody may also be overcome with this memory (7.21 = 7.23 = 805B). Remembrance of death cuts down the consumption of food, and, consequently, destroys passions (6.12 = 6.13

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<sup>1</sup> N.V. Sakharov. *The Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*. D.Phil thesis. Oxford, 1999. pp. 285-287.

= 796AB). The baker at the monastery which Climacus had visited said to him that he had attained to concentration of thoughts and tears reminding himself of 'the future flame' by looking at the visible fire (4.16 = 4.17 = 685C). Climacus recommends remembrance of death as a remedy against distraction by looking at physical grandeur and beauty (4.36 = 4.31 = 700 D), against talkativeness (11.9 = 11.7), ἀκηδία (13.15 = 13.10 = 861A) gluttony (14.18 = 14.15 = 865D, 14.31 = 14.28 = 868D, 14.36 = 14.32 = 869D), insensibility (18.6 = 17.5 = 933D) and vainglory (22.41 = 21.22 = 956C). 'Let your reclining in bed be for you an image of your reclining into your grave, and you will sleep less. Let your refreshment at table be for you a reminder of the grim table of those worms, and you will be less indulgent. And in drinking water, do not forget the thirst in that flame, and you will certainly do violence to your nature' (7.18 = 7.21 = 805AB), summarizes Climacus.

What is the meaning of μνήμη θανάτου<sup>1</sup>? It seems to us that it is a complex term with many overtones. The more straightforward meaning is simply a remembering (in the modern sense) about death. As such, it gives meaning to every moment of our life: 'It is impossible, someone says, to spend the present day devoutly unless we regard it as the last of our whole life' (6.24 = 6.26 = 797C). 'Can anyone be found who has spent all his days in monastic life so piously that he has never lost a day, or hour, or moment, but has spent all his time for the Lord, bearing in mind that never in your life can you see the same day twice?' asks Climacus (7.41 = 7.41 = 809A). These words echo the words of Scripture, which, in their turn, are read in the Orthodox Church for the commemoration of John Climacus in the fourth Sunday of Lent: 'Be careful then

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of the patristic tradition is found in N. Vassiliadis, *The Mystery of Death*, trans. P. Chamberas. Athens, 1991. pp. 273-86.

how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, redeeming (ἐξαγοραζόμενοι) the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5.15-16). This preciousness of time, which needs to be 'redeemed', is precisely the message of μνήμη θανάτου.

'In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.' (Sir. 7.36), says the Scripture. These words are echoed by Evagrius: 'A monk should always act as if he were to die on the morrow' (*Prakt.* 29). The *Apophthegmata* ascribe to Evagrius another similar saying: 'Always keep your death in mind and do not forget the eternal judgment, then there will be no fault in your soul' (*Alph.* Evagrius 4), the same idea being repeated by Climacus: 'No one who has acquired the remembrance of death will ever be able to sin' (6.18 = 6.20 = 797A). More than being a grim reminder of the finite number of one's days, μνήμη θανάτου helps a man to be in control of his actions by remembering the responsibility for them. It helps one to be in a 'wedding garment' when facing God after death, so that he 'daily expects his departure from the body, thinking how to meet God' (Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 346). A saying from the Syriac collection of the *Apophthegmata* says that a monk must 'wait in expectation always, and he must admonish himself, saying, "Woe is me"! For how can I stand before the throne of Christ? And how shall I be able to make answer unto him?"' (*Syr.* I.136). Thus there is more to μνήμη θανάτου than simply remembrance. It is a certain state, or disposition of always being ready to stand before God. In the primary stages, this disposition is that of sorrow and discontent, while in the later stages it is associated with love and desire for union with God, because the dominion of sin, which makes encounter with God painful, is overcome.

There is more to μνήμη θανάτου as much as there is to the word μνήμη. ‘Remembrance of death is a daily death’, says Climacus (6.2 = 6.2 = 793B), recalling the words of Apostle Paul ‘I die every day’ (1 Cor. 15.31). This saying was translated into monastic language by Athanasius in *Vita Antonii*: ‘If we, too, live as we were to die each new day, we shall not sin. As to the quotation given, its meaning is this: when we awaken each day, we should think that we shall not live till evening; and again, when about to go to sleep we should think that we should never awaken ... For the fear of greater things involved and the anxiety over torments invariably dissipate the fascination of pleasure and steady the wavering spirit’ (*Alph. Anthony* 19, cf. 91).

If we want to understand what μνήμη θανάτου meant for Climacus and why he associated it with prayer so closely, we need to look at attitudes to death in Antiquity and see how the Early Christians perceived death – it is in this context that Climacus makes his only explicit reference to Classical thought (6.24 = 6.26 = 797C).

Few words are necessary about the evolution of the understanding of death in Christianity. Plato in *Phaedo* speaks about philosophy as the quest for truth, which cannot be satisfied while the soul is linked to the body, owing to its countless demands and distractions (64 c – 66 b). The estrangement from the body practised by the philosophers falls under the definition of ‘separation of the soul from the body (λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος)’ – the definition of death (67 d). Thus, it may be said that ‘the true philosophers are always occupied in the practice of dying (ἀποθνήσκειν μελετῶσι)’ (67 e). Thus, Plato draws an obvious conclusion: ‘There would be a ridiculous contradiction in men studying to live as nearly as they can in a state like that of

death, and yet repining when death comes upon them' (67 e). Although Clement does not explicitly refer to Plato on this particular occasion, he undoubtedly drew on Plato, when he wrote: 'The severance of the soul from the body (ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ψυχῆς χωρισμός), made a life-long study, produces in the philosopher gnostic alacrity, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of chains which bind the soul to the body' (*Strom.* 4.3.12). Seneca, in his turn, was not content with traditional Stoic arguments that death is not evil. Affirming the universal character of fear of death, he admitted: 'It takes great weapons to strike down great monsters' (*Ep.* 82.23). Christians believed that they possessed just such a great weapon to strike down the fear of death. Chrysostom is an example. He believed that lack of the fear of death is what distinguishes Christians, 'for in this we differ from the unbelievers' (*Ad Pop. Ant.* 5.6). He compares those who fear death with children, who may be afraid of a mask, which cannot harm them, but have no fear of fire, which may injure them (*Ibid.* 5.11). 'He who is always afraid of the fire of hell, will never fall into the fire of hell; being made sober by this continual fear' (*Ibid.* 5.10). Discoursing on the Last Judgement, Chrysostom says: 'Let us then imagine to be present now, and reckon each one of us with his own conscience, and account the Judge to be already present, and everything to be revealed and brought forth. For we must not merely stand, but also be manifested. Do ye not blush? Are ye not astonished?' (*In Ep. II ad Cor.* X.6). According to Chrysostom, Paul could truthfully say 'To me, living is Christ and dying is gain' (*Phi.* 1.21) since he had no attachment to material goods, and that 'Those who kill me will work on me no dreadful thing, they will only send me to my proper life, and free from that which is not mine.' (*In Ep. ad Philip.* 3).



Fear of death may have as its reason not only lack of faith, but also lack of repentance. According to Diadochus, 'If we do not confess our involuntary sins as we should, we shall discover an ill-defined fear in ourselves at the hour of death. We who love the Lord should pray that we may be without fear at that time; for if we are afraid then, we will not be able freely to pass by the rulers of the nether world. They will have as their advocate to plead against us the fear which our soul experiences because of its own wickedness.' (*Cap. Gnost.* 100). The following story about Paternuthius conveys a similar message, as it also indicates the value of time and illustrates that human life is given to repent before death:

'He visited another sick brother, and when he saw that he was sorely distressed at his approaching death because his conscience reproached him, he said to him, "In what unprepared state you go to God, bearing the thoughts of your negligent life as accusers." The brother begged and beseeched him to intercede with God for him, that he might be given a little longer in the world, since he intended to amend his life. The father said to him, 'Do you seek an opportunity for repentance now, when your life is over? What have you been doing all your life? Were you not only unable to heal the wounds you have, but even wish to add others?" However, since the brother continued to implore him, he replied, "If you do not add other evils to your life, if you are truly repentant, we shall pray to Christ for you. For He is good and long-suffering, and he grants you little longer to live that you may repay everything." And when he had prayed, he said to him, "Behold, God has granted you three years in this life. Only repent with all your soul." And taking him by the hand, he raised him up there and then and led him into the desert. When the three years were up, he

brought him back to the village and presented him to Christ no longer a man but an angel, so that all were amazed at his supernatural power.' (*Historia Monachorum* X.17-19).

Chrysostom is by no means an exception. There is a certain attitude to death in the Christian tradition, which allows seeing death as a positive fact in one's being and makes the awareness of death and its importance central to one's spiritual life. God is the only source of life, and man is alive only by participating in God. Having fallen away from God, man partook of the reality of death. Immortal life may be achieved only in that state of the world, when God will be all in all. However, in Daniélou's expression, 'the eschatological return of Christ is accomplished for everyone at the moment of his death'<sup>1</sup>. This eschatological perspective, marked by the transience of human life, is what characterises the traditional Christian perception of death. Proclaiming salvation through the death of Christ, Christianity at the same time calls us to participate in this death, and so the longing for death, as in the case of Apostle Paul, is made possible. As Daniélou points out, this 'nostalgie de la mort' traverses through the whole of patristic thought<sup>2</sup>. Martyrs, whose *Lives* describe their eagerness to accept death for Christ, are too numerous to enumerate. One of the early martyrs, Ignatius of Antioch, wrote: 'For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die. My ἔπος has been crucified, and there is no fire in me desiring to be fed; but there is within me water that lives and speaks, saying to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, or in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniélou, J. *La doctrine de la mort chez les Pères de l'Église*. In : *Le Mystère de la Mort et sa Célébration*. Vanves, 27 - 29 Avril 1949. *Lex orandi* 12. Paris, 1951. p.149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 143.

Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life. (*Rom.* 7.1-3). Daniélou says, 'In this incomparable passage there is an intense perception of the sovereign reality of the world in glory. Death is childhood which opens the true life to us. It is the true birth.'<sup>1</sup> Cyprian of Carthage had a similar perception of death. Addressing Christians, who were worried about the high death rate caused by plague, he wrote: 'What man, after having been abroad, would not hasten to return to his native land? Who, when hurrying to sail to his family, would not more eagerly long for a favourable wind that he might more quickly embrace his dear ones? We account paradise our country, we have already begun to look upon the patriarchs as our parents ... How great a joy it is both for them and for us in common to come into their sight and embrace! What pleasure there in the heavenly kingdom without fear of death, and with an eternity of life the highest possible and everlasting happiness.' (*De Mortalitate* 26) It is not accidental, therefore that in Orthodox iconography the soul at death is often represented as a baby – most famously, in the iconography of the Assumption<sup>2</sup>. We see a similar picture in the liturgical expression of death: although in no way does the liturgy ignore the tragedy of death, it is also the beginning of liberation, comparable to the liberation of Israel from Egypt<sup>3</sup>.

Climacus had no illusions about people's usual perception of death: he was aware that fear of death is a natural attribute of the fallen human being, being 'a property of nature (ιδίωμα φύσεως)' (6.3 = 6.3 = 793B). Climacus also knows that remembrance of death among those who live in vanity

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> C. Walter, *Death in Byzantine Iconography*. In: *Eastern Churches Review* 18. 1976. pp. 119-121.

<sup>3</sup> P. Fedwick, *Death and Dying in Byzantine Liturgical Traditions*. In: *Eastern Churches Review* 18. 1976. p. 155.

(παρὰ μὲν τοῖς ἐν μέσῳ) and those who are away from it (παρὰ δὲ τοῖς ἐκτὸς θορύβων)<sup>1</sup> have different consequences. In the first case, it causes distress, loquacity, and most of all faint-heartedness, while in the second case it produces putting aside of cares, constant prayer and guarding of mind (6.4 = 6.6 = 793C). Accepting fear of death as an attribute of fallen humanity, he believes that it may be overcome. This is clear from the following passages: ‘Fear of death is a property of nature that comes from disobedience, but trembling at death is a sign of unrepented sins. Christ fears death, but does not tremble, in order to demonstrate clearly the properties of His two natures’ (6.3 = 6.4 = 793BC). Nevertheless, he affirms: ‘Just as the Fathers lay down that perfect love is free from falls, so I for my part declare that a perfect sense of death is free from fear’ (6.14 = 6.16 = 796B). Ultimately the saints long for death at every hour (6.7 = 6.8 = 793CD, 26.19 = 26.14 = 1017B).

It would be wrong to say that Climacus is concerned with overcoming the fear of death as such – rather, he sees its elimination simply as a consequence of spiritual progress.

It is easier to see now why Climacus lays such a heavy stress on the connection between prayer and μνήμη θανάτου. The answer to this question probably lies behind the words: ‘For him who truly prays, prayer is the court, the judgement hall and the tribunal of the Lord before the judgement to come’ (28.1 = 28.1 = 1129B). Both prayer and remembrance of death place one before God, this presence being a κρίσις in itself. The approach of Climacus recalls that of Diadochus: ‘only the thought of death can nullify all the various influences of the

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<sup>1</sup> Fr Lazarus Moore believed that Climacus contrasts ‘those in the midst of society’ and ‘those free from noise’, presumably monks and laypeople, translating this passage accordingly. It seems to us that Climacus contrasts those who lead a spiritual life and those who do not, and so we have altered the translation.

evil spirits by bringing us back to the remembrance of God' (*Cap. Gnost.* 81). Prayer for Climacus is anticipation of the life to come; it anticipates both the future bliss of communion with God and the Last Judgement, because the presence of God can be torment as well as joy, depending on the inner state of man (e.g. 28.51 = 28.52 = 1137C).

### *Πένθος and tears*

It would now be appropriate to examine these notions after looking at μνήμη θανάτου, because in Climacus' discourse on πένθος the themes of prayer and remembrance of death are interwoven.

Few words need to be said about πένθος in the patristic tradition in general<sup>1</sup>. Liddell&Scott's *Lexicon* defines it as 'grief, sorrow, esp. sorrow for the dead'. The Christian tradition has certainly retained this overtone: 'One day Abba Poemen went with Abba Anoub to the district of Diolcos. Arriving at the cemetery, they saw a woman in great sorrow, weeping bitterly. Standing there they watched her. Going a little further they met someone and Abba Poemen asked him, 'What is this woman weeping so bitterly for? He said, 'Because her husband is dead and her son and her brother.' Abba Poemen said to the brother, 'I tell you, if a man does not mortify all his carnal desires and acquire πένθος like this, he cannot become a monk. Truly the whole of this woman's life and soul are turned to πένθος' (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Poemen 72, cf. *ibid.* Poemen 6, Poemen 26,). Same imagery may be found in Climacus (1.6 = 1.13 = 633D, 7.13 = 7.16 = 804D, 7.60 = 7.59 = 813D, 26.s61 = 26-3.52 = 1089).

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<sup>1</sup> The best study on this subject is I. Hausherr. *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1982 (CS 53). A more concise treatment may be found in J. Pegon. *Componction*. DS. Vol. 2 pt. 2. col. 1312-1321.

Gregory of Nyssa defined πένθος as ‘a sorrowful disposition of the soul which arises from being deprived of some of the things that are pleasant’ (σκυθρωπή διάθεσις τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐπὶ στερήσει τινὸς τῶν καταθυμίων συνισταμένη) (*De Beat.* 3, GNO VII,2. 102. 17-18). Climacus expands this definition: ‘Πένθος according to God is sadness of soul and the disposition of a sorrowing heart (σκυθρωπότης ψυχῆς, ἐνωδύνου καρδίας διάθεσις), which ever madly seeks that for which it thirsts; and when it fails in its quest, it painfully pursues it, and follows in its wake grievous lamenting’ (7.1 = 7.1 = 801C). It is God, who is sought for, and for whom there is thirst.

In his study of πένθος, Hausherr gives five reasons for tears in the ascetic tradition: the loss of salvation, the certainty of death and judgement, daily faults, brotherly love and the love of God.

Remembrance of death and judgment, which we have spoken of earlier, is certainly one of the main causes of πένθος. The *Apophthegmata* tells us about Abba Arsenius: ‘When his death drew near, the brethren saw him weeping and they said to him ‘Truly, Father, are you also afraid?’ ‘Indeed,’ he answered them, ‘the fear which is mine upon this hour has been with me ever since I became a monk’ Upon this he fell asleep’ (*Alph.* Arsenius 40). The next narrative reads: ‘It was said of him that he had a hollow in his chest channelled out by the tears which fell from his eyes all his life while he sat at his manual work. When Abba Poemen learned that he was dead, he said weeping, ‘Truly you are blessed, Abba Arsenius, for you wept for yourself in this world! He who does not weep for himself here will weep eternally hereafter; so it is impossible not to weep, either voluntarily or when compelled through suffering’ (*Alph.* Arsenius 41). As we

shall see, these two stories provide us with insight into the meaning of *μνήμη θανάτου* and *πένθος* in general.

The connection between *πένθος* and the remembrance of death in Climacus is obvious; the discourse on the first follows the discourse on the second (27 = 7.30 = 808A, 7.33 = 7.35 = 808C). The notion of mourning for another man, which Hausherr lists as one of the reasons for *πένθος*, is also not unfamiliar to Climacus. He writes: ‘A man will know his brotherly love and his genuine charity when he sees that he mourns (*πενθοῦντα*) for his brother’s sins, and rejoices at his progress and gifts’ (4.47 = 4.40 = 705A). The last reason, in Hausherr’s list is what Cassian, in his exposition of *πένθος* called ‘thirst for the strong and living God’ (*Conl.* IX.XXIX.2). While this is not one of the subjects that Climacus expounds on, he has an interesting distinction between the two kinds of tears: ‘Tears shed from fear intercede for us; but tears of all-holy love show that our prayer has been accepted’ (7.7 = 7.9 = 804B). ‘Tears over our departure produce fear. But when fear gives birth to fearlessness, joy dawns. But when constant joy is obtained, holy love bursts into flower’ (7.56 = 7.44 = 813BC).

Tears are, first of all, a Divine gift, an effect of God’s grace upon one’s soul. Climacus notes that tears, being a Divine gift, sometimes may come immediately from God, who comes ‘uninvited’: ‘When the soul becomes tearful, moist and tender without effort or trouble, then let us run, for the Lord has come uninvited, and is giving us a sponge of God-loving sorrow and the cool water of devout tears to wipe out the record of your sins. Guard these tears until they withdraw. Great is the power of this compunction, greater than that which comes as a result of our own effort and reflection’ (7.25 = 7.27 = 805D – 808A).

Tears are a way of the soul's transfiguration by God: 'The abyss of mourning has seen comfort ... Comfort is the solace of the sorrowing soul which, like a child, at once both whimpers to itself and shouts happily. Divine succour is the renewal of the soul depressed by grief which, in a wonderful way, transforms painful tears into painless ones' (7.55 = 7.53 = 813B). Although here Climacus distinguishes between 'painful' and 'painless' tears on this occasion, the difference between them is vague: 'When I consider the actual nature of compunction, I am amazed at how that which is called mourning and grief should contain joy and gladness interwoven with it, like honey in the comb. What then are we to learn from this? That such compunction is, in a special sense, a gift from the Lord. There is<sup>1</sup>, then, in the soul, a pleasureless pleasure (ἀνῆδονος ἡδονή), for God consoles those who are contrite in heart in a hidden way' (7.49 = 7.50 = 812A). On the whole, Climacus likes to use paradoxical language when speaking about πένθος and tears:

'He who is clothed in blessed and grace-filled (κεχαριτωμένος) πένθος as in a wedding garment knows the spiritual laughter of the soul' (7.40 = 7.41 = 809A). At the same time, κατάνυξις, one of the facets of πένθος, is χαρμολύπος (7.9 = 7.11 = 804B). 'He who wends his way in constant πένθος according to God does not cease to feast daily' (7.37 = 7.38 = 808D). Even in the title of the chapter πένθος is called 'joy-making' (χαροποιός).

When we look at Climacus' contemporary Isaac the Syrian, we see similar picture: often he does not clearly distinguish between bitter and sweet tears<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, according to Cassian *compunctio* is by no means altogether miserable:

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<sup>1</sup> We have altered L. Moore's translation here: οὐκ is bound to be a corruption in the manuscript tradition, as it makes no sense.

<sup>2</sup> Alfeyev. *Isaac*. Ch. V.2



‘frequently the fruit of a very beneficial compunction emerges from an ineffable joy and gladness of spirit, such that it even breaks forth into shouts because of a joy that is too vast to be repressed, and the heart’s delight and the great exultation reach the cell of one’s neighbour.’ (*Conl.* IX.XXVII) In fact seeing one’s sin is itself a sign of God’s presence, which is a source of joy. In the same discourse, Abba Germanus says: ‘Frequently, when tears well up at the memory of my past offences, I am so shaken by an unspeakable joy at the Lord’s visitation ... that the greatness of this happiness dictates that I should not despair of their being pardoned ... Therefore, as much as I rejoice in that outpouring of tears, I regret that I am unable to regain it whenever I wish’ (*Ibid.* IX.XXVIII.1-2).

In Climacus we encounter an idea which places asceticism within a broader theological framework – the link between tears and baptism:

‘Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism, even though it is somewhat audacious to say so. For baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. As baptism is received in infancy, we have all defiled it, but we cleanse it anew with tears. And God in His love for mankind had not given us tears, those being saved would be few indeed and hard to find’ (7.6 = 7.8 = 804AB).

This saying requires some reflection. It is not, however, as original as it may seem. It is possible, as Chrysostom suggests<sup>1</sup>, that Climacus owes this idea to Gregory of Nazianzus, who wrote about five kinds of baptism: allegorical baptism of Moses in the Red Sea, baptism of penitence by John the Baptist, baptism of Jesus in the Spirit, baptism of martyrs by blood, and baptism by tears. The latter, he writes, ‘is much more laborious, received by him who washes his

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<sup>1</sup> *Ascent.* p.157.n.140.

bed every night and his couch with tears; who bruises stink through his wickedness; and who goes mourning of a sad countenance; who imitates the repentance of Manasseh and the humiliation of the Ninevites upon whom God had no mercy; who utters the words of the Publican in the Temple, and is justified rather than the stiff-necked Pharisee, who like the Canaanite woman bends down and asks for mercy and crumbs, the food of a dog that is very hungry' (*Or.* XXXIX.17). A similar idea is found in Ephrem the Syrian<sup>1</sup>.

It is also possible that Climacus, by speaking about tears as second baptism, is an heir to a more general idea common in ascetic literature, that tears cleanse sins. Abba Poemen says: 'He who wishes to purify his faults purifies them with tears' (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Poemen 119). Barsanuphius of Gaza concludes from the narrative about the prostitute washing Christ's feet with her tears (Lk. 7.38) that 'weeping (κλαυθμός) cleanses (νίπτει) transgressions' (257). Climacus himself brings up this idea a number of times: 'honest tears are a bath' (4.8 = 4.10 = 681A), 'tears wipe out sins' (7.25 = 7.27 = 805D – 808A). 'As writing is washed out by water, so sins can be washed out by tears' (26.s44 = 26-3.35 = 1088D, cf. 28.49 = 28.51 = 1137B). It is said about the penitent thief, who made a confession in the middle of the Church, moistening the floor with tears, that 'he did not rise from the floor until he was granted remission (ἄφεσις) of sins' (4.12 = 4.15 = 684C).

Climacus by no means undermines the value of the sacrament. We must keep in memory that for the Fathers sin was a disease as much as a crime, and it required healing as much as absolution. Tears are precisely the sign of the soul's healing, returning to its proper state of communion with God. Thus, the

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<sup>1</sup> A. Vööbus, *Literary, Critical and Historical Studies in Ephrem the Syrian*. Stockholm: Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile; 10, 1958. p. 112.

significance of the theology of 'baptism of tears' is that it is as the same Holy Spirit that operates both in baptism and in the gift of tears, sacramental and spiritual life are inseparable from each other.

When Climacus speaks about tears, does he necessarily mean bodily tears? The answer may not be obvious. For example, in the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius we read: 'Πένθος is sadness according to God, which is born from repentance ... Joy (φαιδρότης) is cheerfulness according to God, which decently shows itself in words and outward expression when meeting other people. Let the heart keep πένθος, and face and word – decent cheerfulness' (*Corr.* 730). Replying to the question of whether there is πένθος of heart without tears, Brasnuphius gives a positive answer, saying that πένθος is not born of tears, but tears of πένθος (*Ibid.* 285). An interesting remark may be found in the *Greek Life of Pachomius*: 'Tears are always a mark of emotion. And even if someone does not weep although he is moved at the time the events happens, there is also the inner weeping (ἔσω τὸ δακρύνειν)' (*Gl.* 53). Although Vieilleux may be right in suggesting that this remark is 'a copyist's gloss'<sup>1</sup>, it nevertheless shows that such a thing as 'inner weeping' was not unknown to ancient monasticism. There is a further proof of that in *Paralipomena*, where monks say to one who would not stop weeping even during the meal: 'It is possible for him who is pricked by compunction to weep by himself and to do likewise when he is at prayer with the brothers. But when someone eats at table with the brothers, it is possible for his soul to weep continually without those visible tears' (*Paral.* 3).

The author of Climacus' *Vita* described his tears in very realistic terms, perhaps not without some exaggeration: 'But where in the present weaving of our

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<sup>1</sup> *Pachomian Koinonia*. Tr. with an introd. By A. Vieilleux. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications. 1981-1982. 3 Vols. (CS 45-47). Vol 1. p. 413.

crown am I to put that fountain of his tears, which we see in so few? And the hidden place where those tears were shed is still known to the present day. It is an extremely small cave at the foot of a mountain, at a sufficient distance from his own and from every other cell to guard the hearing from vainglory, but it was made near to heaven by shouts and cries, such as can be heard from those who are pierced through with swords or burned with hot iron or whose eyes are turned out'. When Climacus distinguishes between δάκρυον ψυχικόν and tears διὰ τοῦ ἐκτὸς (7.12 = 7.14 = 804D), it is not clear if he opposes the 'inner tears' to 'bodily tears', or if he says that in the first case the tears are 'heartfelt', as Lazarus Moore's translation says. While it is not clear if Climacus believes in 'πένθος without tears', he is firm on another point: bodily tears are not a measure of perfection: 'I have seen small tear-drops shed with difficulty like drops of blood, and I have also seen fountains of tears poured out without difficulty. And I judged those toilers more by their toils than by their tears, and I think God does also' (7.23 = 7.25 = 805C).

Having looked at compunction and tears in the ascetic tradition, we may be faced with a difficulty. For some modern Christians (and not only Christians) it may be difficult to understand, why the Fathers saw the Gospel, which is a joyous proclamation of the victory of Christ, as an occasion for weeping? It seems that to them the distortion of the human state was revealed only through the revelation of the love of God. This revelation meant a conscious and painful discovery of deformation of the Divine image within oneself, and it was only through this labour that one could consciously accept the fruits of the Atonement with joy and gratitude.

### *Unceasing prayer*

While not extensively discussing unceasing prayer, Climacus mentions it on a number of occasions (4.41 = 4.33 = 704B, 4.118 = 4.119 = 725B, 6.4 = 6.6 = 793C, 18.5 = 17.5 = 933B, 28.27 = 28.30 = 1133D, 28.25 = 28.28 = 1133C, 28.29 = 28.33 = 1136A, 28.60 = 28.59 = 1140A, 28.63 = 28.61 = 1140B). The brethren of the monastery Climacus had visited were engaged in ceaseless 'mental activity (νοερὰ ἐργασία)' 'not only in the refectory, but at every encounter and gathering', and engaged in 'interior prayer (κατὰ ψυχὴν προσευχή)' (4.17 = 4.18 = 685C). Unceasing prayer is a weapon against insensitivity (18.5 = 17.5 = 933B). Climacus stresses that unceasing prayer is not a substitute for prayer at set times; on the contrary, it helps praying at appointed times (28.31 = 28.35 = 1136AB)<sup>1</sup>. Spiritual activity, such as meditation on the Psalms, may even continue during sleep (30.13 = 30.6 = 1156D), for 'the soul which has spent all day unceasingly engaged with the word of the Lord will love to be occupied with it in sleep too' (20.20 = 19.13 = 941C, also 27.17 = 27.16 = 1100A).

In the context of relation of prayer to labour, Climacus' exegesis of Mt. 6.24 is striking: 'It is impossible to occupy the mind with God and mammon, that is, both with God and manual labour' (14.26 = 14.23 = 868BC). 'It is not proper for anyone to engage in any accessory work, or rather distraction, during the time of prayer. For the angel who attended Anthony the Great taught him this clearly' (19.7 = 18.6 = 937D). In order to foil a prayer of a vigilant monk demons suggest him to do handiwork (20.15 = 19.9 = 941B). By contrasting prayer and labour Climacus may seem to be in dissonance with the earlier tradition, characterized

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<sup>1</sup> Same in Cassian (*Conl.* X.XIV,2).

by its high esteem of labour. If we want to see what Climacus means in these passages, we must first find out what he does not. There is no reason to believe that Climacus, while being an adherent of the traditional ideal of unceasing prayer, disapproved of labour as such. This would be unreasonable for an abbot, which Climacus was. Therefore, it seems to us that on this occasion Climacus speaks about prayer in a very narrow sense of the word.

Essentially the problem may be formulated very simply: how can the commandment 'Pray unceasingly' (1 Thess. 5.17) be reconciled with other monastic duties? According to Palladius, when Abba Pambo was dying, he confessed that he had not eaten anything that was not earned by his manual labour (*Historia Lausiaca* 10.6). In the *Apophthegmata*, to which Climacus refers to prove his point, a more explicit theology of labour may be found. 'It was said of Abba John the Dwarf, that one day he said to his elder brother, 'I should like to be free from all care, like the angels, who do not work, but ceaselessly offer worship to God.' So he took off his cloak and went away into the desert. After a week he came back to his brother. When he knocked on the door, he heard his brother say, before he opened it 'Who are you?' He said, 'I am John, your brother.' But he replied, 'John has become an angel, and henceforth he is no longer among men.' Then the other begged him saying, 'It is I.' However, his brother did not let him in, but left him in distress until morning. Then, opening the door, he said to him, 'You are a man and you must once again work in order to eat.' Then John made a prostration before him, saying, 'Forgive me.' (*Alph. John the Dwarf* 2). When John says, 'I should be free from all care (ἀμέριμνος)' he is apparently faithful to the words of Christ 'Do not worry (μὴ μεριμνᾶτε) what to eat or drink' (Mt 6.25), while also trying not to imitate Martha, who was

reproached for worrying and troubling (μεριμνάω καὶ θορυβάζω) (Lk. 10.41). In fact, John is shown to be faithful to the Gospel only superficially. It is not ἀμεριμνία as such that is criticised here but its premature and caricatured expression. The following passage from the *Scala* may remind us of the *Apophthegmata* passage just quoted. Christ addresses a monk: ‘I will teach you the visible activity and life of the spiritual powers. They never weary of praising their Maker to all eternity, and he who ascends to the heaven of stillness never ceases to praise his Creator. Immaterial spirits will not think about the material, nor will those who have become immaterial in a material body think about food’ (27.28 = 27.26 = 1101A). However, Climacus describes this state as a gift of God rather than something one must attempt spontaneously.

The following passage illustrates integral faithfulness to the Gospel by reconciling unceasing prayer and labour: ‘Some of the monks who are called Euchites went to Enaton to see Abba Lucius. The old man asked them, ‘What is your manual work?’ They said, ‘We do not touch manual work but as the Apostle says, we pray without ceasing.’ The old man asked them if they did not eat and they replied they did. So he said to them, ‘When you are eating, who prays for you then?’ Again he asked them if they did not sleep and they replied they did. And he said to them, ‘When you are asleep, who prays for you then?’ They could not find any answer to give him. He said to them, ‘Forgive me, but you do not act as you speak. I will show you how, while doing my manual work, I pray without interruption. I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes, and I say, “God, have mercy on me; according to your great goodness and according to the multitude of your mercies, save me from my sins.”’ So he asked them if this were not prayer and they replied it was. Then he said to them,

‘So when I have spent the whole day working and praying, making thirteen pieces of money more or less, I put two pieces of money outside the door and I pay for my food with the rest of money. He who takes the two pieces of money prays for me when I am eating and when I am sleeping; so, by the grace of God, I fulfil the precept to pray without ceasing’ (*Apophthegmata Alph. Lucius* 1). Several things may be extracted from this passage. Abba Lucius adopts a view of prayer as virtuous life, which includes even works of charity. Thus, it may be and should be unceasing. The same idea is affirmed by Basil the Great, in whose writings a more explicit theology of *ora et labora* may be found. While affirming that prayer and work must have times of their own, he also says: ‘In the midst of our work can we fulfil the duty of prayer, giving thanks to Him who has granted strength to our hands for performing our tasks and cleverness to our minds for acquiring knowledge, and for having provided the materials, both that which is in the instruments we use and that which forms the matter of the arts in which we may be engaged, praying that the work of our hands may be directed toward its goal, the good pleasure of God’ (*Reg. Brev. Tract.* 37).

We have no ground to think that Climacus rejected the monastic principle of *ora et labora*. By his insistence on the incompatibility of prayer and labour, he safeguards the balance in the rhythm of monastic life. Thus, there is no dissonance between Climacus and earlier tradition. Like the earlier authors, Climacus took seriously the task of unceasing prayer and did not deny the necessity of work. In Climacus, however, explorations of prayer lead him to stress its ultimate importance.

Nevertheless, while there is no real contradiction between the *Apophthegmata* and Climacus, there is a certain difference of outlook. The *Scala*



contains a noteworthy saying: 'It is difficult to overcome the midday nap, especially in the summer time; then, and perhaps only then, is manual work permissible' (27.48 = 27-2.14 = 1009C). Being placed in the discourse on ἡσυχία, this saying relates to the solitary life. However, manual labour is described simply as a means against drowsiness, rather than as monastic *duty*. Similarly, the monks in the Prison were given leaves for making baskets simply as a remedy against depression (4.41 = 4.33 = 704B). Why did this shift happen, which is also noticeable in Climacus' remarks on labour quoted above? One of the reasons could be an economic one. For the 4<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian monks manual labour was their sole means of supporting themselves. Manual labour was an integral part of the Palestinian monasticism of a later period<sup>1</sup>, and it was bound to be a part of the monastic routine on Sinai. However, while hermits around Sinai grew necessary food, they were bound to receive support from the monastery and probably from the pilgrims.

The ideal of continual prayer in the East changed in the course of time. Origen believed that 'he who prays without ceasing joins prayer to works that are of obligation, and good works to his prayer. For virtuous works, or the carrying out of what is enjoined, form part of prayer. It is only in this way that we can understand the injunction, pray without ceasing, as something that we carry out; that is to say, if we regard the whole life of the saint as one great continuous prayer. What is usually termed "prayer" is but a part of this prayer, and it should be performed not less than three times each day' (*De Orat.* XII.2). Thus, Origen expands the definition of prayer to embrace all of life, with all its virtuous activities. Basil the Great understood prayer similarly: prayer is not to be offered

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<sup>1</sup> Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992. pp. 104-111.

only in words, but also in virtuous deeds. Nevertheless, Basil urged a continual calling upon God, as whatever we see in ourselves or around us gives reasons to call upon Him in gratitude – whether it is the food He gives us, or the beauty of nature or anything else. ‘Let even our dreams be an exercise in piety, for even our dreams during sleep are often echoes of our daily cares: whatever our usual affairs are, such our dreams are bound to be’ (*Hom in Mart. Jul.* PG 31. 244D). Later on, as the Jesus prayer was developed, it became inseparable from continual prayer. Abba Lucius says it is impossible to pray during meals or sleep. Climacus, as we could see above, believed it to be possible. His *Vita* says that ‘his whole life was unceasing prayer and unexampled love for God; for day and night he beheld Him as it were in a spotless mirror of chastity, and he could never, nor indeed were it possible that he should ever have enough of this vision’. But the ultimate fulfilment of the commandment to pray continuously was yet to be discovered in the Jesus prayer. In the Orthodox monastic tradition the Jesus prayer at the later stages of its practice is believed to become ‘self-impelled’ and ‘self-acting’<sup>1</sup>. This monastic teaching has been popularised by *The Way of a Pilgrim*. It is now hardly possible to discuss continual prayer in an Orthodox milieu other than in terms of the Jesus prayer.

In this tradition Climacus stands in the middle. He defines the state of ἡσυχία as ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων (Evagrian definition of prayer (*De Or.* 70)) (27.51 = 27-2.17 = 112A) and as ‘unceasing worship and waiting upon God’ (27.60 = 27-2.25 = 1112C), and while not treating unceasing prayer in the same way as later hesychast tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> See K. Ware. *Pray Without Ceasing: The Ideal of Continual Prayer in Eastern Monasticism*. In: Ware, K. *The Inner Kingdom*. Volume 1 of the Collected Works. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s University Press, 2000. pp. 82-85, K. Ware. *The Power of the Name: the Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*. Oxford : SLG, 1986. pp. 18-20.

## *The Jesus prayer*

Is the Jesus prayer in the *Scala*? If we want to answer this question, we need to define what it is. Its classical formulation is: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me' with or without the addition of 'a sinner'. Various definitions of the Jesus prayer have been given. A Monk of the Eastern Church (Lev Gillet) defined it as 'a technical term in Byzantine Spirituality which designates the invocation of the name Jesus, whether alone or inserted into a more or less extended formula'<sup>1</sup>. Archbishop Krivochéine has defined it as 'a particular form of mental prayer consisting in the constant interior repetition of short invocations centred on the name of Jesus'<sup>2</sup>. P. Adnès thought it was 'a certain special form of prayer, in the usage of Christian Byzantine and Slavs ... the continuous invocation of Jesus by a monk in a short formula which constitutes an act of faith in His Divine messianity and implores His mercy'<sup>3</sup>. What is this 'name of Jesus'? Azovkin accuses Adnès of failing 'to indicate that specific feature of the Jesus prayer which distinguishes it from other forms of prayer: it is not only an invocation of Christ (something self-evident in Christianity), but an invoking of His Name, Jesus. Indeed, all practitioners of the Jesus prayer have attributed great value to the power of the Holy Name, which has been regarded as the essence of Prayer. It seems reasonable, therefore, to limit the phrase 'the Jesus prayer' to 'the prayer of the Name of Jesus'<sup>4</sup>. This is a doubtful statement. In the words of Hausherr, 'The essence of the Jesus prayer requires a request for mercy together with a name or title of the Saviour that

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<sup>1</sup> *The Jesus Prayer*. Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987. p 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Date du texte traditionnel de la Prière de Jésus*. In: *Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarche russe en Europe occidentale*. No. 7-8. Paris. 1951. p. 66. The translation of the passage is that of C. Cummings from I. Hausherr. *The Name of Jesus*. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1981 (CS 44). p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> *Prière à Jésus*. DS. Vol. 8. col. 1126.

<sup>4</sup> *Hesychios*. p.137.

implies an act of faith in Him as Messiah, as Son of God, as God himself<sup>1</sup>. In the patristic tradition there has never been a tradition of separating the name Jesus from the name Christ or attributing various degrees of power to each one. The name of Jesus is Jesus Christ. As K. Ware points out, the invocation of both names 'Jesus' and 'Christ' gives doctrinal integrity and completeness to the Jesus prayer, by uniting the names of Christ's humanity and Divinity<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it makes the Incarnation of God, the central event of history, also central to one's inner life.

Let us look closer at the passages, which may relate to the Jesus prayer. On the whole, Climacus lays a heavy stress on the simplicity of verbal prayer (28.5 = 28.4 = 1129D). 'Do not be try to verbose when you pray, lest your mind be distracted in searching for words ... Πολυλογία in prayer often distracts the mind and leads it to fantasy, whereas μονολογία makes for concentration' (28.10 = 28.9 = 1132B). Climacus speaks about 'Ἰησοῦ προσευχή' (9.10 = 9.9 = 841C), but does not clarify what it is. L. Moore suggests that it is the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner", but he admits that Climacus could have meant the Lord's Prayer, as it is suggested by the context (remembrance of wrongs)<sup>3</sup>. Climacus also writes: 'Always let the remembrance of death and the Prayer of Jesus being of single phrase (μονολόγιστος Ἰησοῦ εὐχή), go to sleep with you and get up with you' (15.54 = 15.51 = 889CD). In 19.6 = 18.5 = 937D, too, Climacus most likely speaks about some kind of short prayer, which is to be said between the verses being sung in the church. There is also a saying in the *Scala*, which expresses in a certain way the power of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Name*. p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> *The Power of the Name*. p.8.

<sup>3</sup> In: John Climacus. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Tr. by Archim Lazarus Moore. Faber and Faber. London. 1959. p.130 n.

name: 'Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or earth' (21.7 = 20.6 = 945C).

The passage which was to become a classic is: 'Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of ἡσυχία' (27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C). There is no reason to believe that Climacus is making any connection of the Jesus prayer with breathing, like the later hesychasts, who saw Climacus as an advocate of this practice. Most likely he uses 'breath' simply as an image, as he does on another occasion (4.21 = 4.19 = 688C).

However, as we shall see, this passage of Climacus was quoted by Hesychios of Sinai and later authors as referring specifically to the Jesus prayer. Does Climacus speak about the Jesus prayer in this passage? Hausherr believes that he does not. The context of this saying is uninterrupted prayer. Thus, Hausherr concludes: 'The name of Jesus has the same meaning as in Diadochus and similar writers. It would be a misunderstanding to think that it means repeating the two or three syllables (depending on the language) of the word 'Jesus' A good paraphrase would be: 'With every breath remember Jesus' or 'Renew the memory of Jesus as often as you breathe'. Climacus was referring to what is commonly called in ascetic literature 'the memory of God' (μνήμη Θεοῦ)<sup>1</sup>. Is Hausherr correct? We believe that the evidence within the *Scala* is not sufficient to answer this question. While the text itself provides us with no ground to affirm with certainty that Climacus refers to Jesus prayer, this is by no means impossible. First of all, the Greek term μνήμη Θεοῦ is broader than English 'remembrance of God'. Μνήμη may be very close to invocation or

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<sup>1</sup> *Name*. p.282.

even synonymous with it. This is certainly the case with Diadochus: the Jesus prayer is certainly identical with 'remembrance of the precious name' (*Cap. Gnost.* 59) and 'remembrance of the glorious and holy name of the Lord Jesus' (*Ibid.* 31).

Azovkin believes that the fact that Climacus is the first author to use the expression Ἰησοῦ εὐχή indicates that he refers to a familiar practice among Sinaite monks<sup>1</sup>. He probably exaggerates when saying about Climacus that 'the occasional character of his references to the invocation of the Holy Name may indicate not simply a lack of interest with regard to the Jesus prayer, but rather its spread and popularity among the monks. It could have been accepted and practised as part of oral monastic tradition, transmitted from the elder to his disciples'<sup>2</sup>. There is simply no evidence, which could support such a claim. However, there is evidence that by that period the Jesus prayer gained acceptance in monastic circles. We are now going to look at this evidence briefly.

Before looking at the first appearance of Jesus prayer in the monastic tradition, the writings of Diadochus of Photike must be examined. How relevant is he to the discussion? Characteristically, Hausherr excludes him from the discussion on the Jesus prayer and discusses him under the heading 'Short prayers and the psychology of the memory of God'. Can we speak about the Jesus prayer in Diadochus? The difficulty is that it is not found in Diadochus' writings in any form. This causes Hausherr to believe that 'evidently he did not know it. His spirituality was based on the memory of God (*mneme theou*) in the tradition of St Basil, St Gregory Nazianzen, Mark the Hermit and others'<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hesychios.* p.148.

<sup>2</sup> *Hesychios.* p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> *Name.* p.226.

Without immersing in a lengthy analysis of Diadochus' treatise, it must be repeated, as may be clear from some passages (e.g. *Cap. Gnost.* 31, 59), he uses 'remembrance' in the meaning of 'invocation'. In ch. 59 he writes: 'the intellect requires of us imperatively some task which will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfilment of its purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer "Lord Jesus"'. As K. Ware notes, it is hardly possible that Diadochus recommended the use the words 'Lord Jesus' as a prayer in its own right – it must be an abbreviation for some well-known formula<sup>1</sup>. Not only we can be sure that it was the Jesus prayer in some form which was the subject of Diadochus' discussion – K. Ware persuasively argues that a developed theology of the Jesus prayer may be found in Diadochus' writings<sup>2</sup>.

It is in the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John that we find the Jesus prayer in a form which is familiar to us. Having been asked whether it is good to practice the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me' or to learn the passages from the Scripture and recite the psalms, Barsanuphius replies that these occupations must be alternated (*Corr.* 175). As has been pointed out by Azovkin, if the tradition of practising only the Jesus prayer had not existed, the monks would not have asked about it<sup>3</sup>. While not focusing on the Jesus prayer in its known formula, the elders are keen on the invocation of Christ in short repetitive prayers. The power of these prayers lies in God's name (e.g. *Corr.* 425, etc) – a motive which later occurs in Climacus. It is also interesting that the Elders see the fulfilment of the commandment to pray continuously in the invocation of God's name (*Ibid.* 425, 709).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Jesus Prayer in St Diadochus of Photice*. In: *Aksum-Thyateira. A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodius of Thyateira and Great Britain*. Ed. G.D. Dragas. Athens, 1985. pp. 560-561.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* esp. pp. 562-568.

<sup>3</sup> *Hesychios*. p. 147.

The notion of the Jesus prayer reappears in the *Life of Saint Dosithy*. Dosithy was a disciple of Dorotheos of Gaza, who, in his turn, was a disciple of Barsanuphius and John. Thus, we see a certain continuity of tradition. According to the narrative, 'he lived in continual remembrance of God. [Dorotheos of Gaza, his spiritual father] had handed down to him the rule that he should always repeat these words: 'Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on me. Son of God, save me!' He therefore said this prayer continually. When he fell ill, he [Dorotheos] said to him: Dosithy, do not neglect your prayer. Make sure that you never let go of it.' The sick man answered, 'I will do as you say, Father, only pray for me.' Later when he was almost completely worn out [by the disease] he [Dorotheos] said to him: 'How are you, now, Dosithy? How is the prayer going? Do you say it all the time?' And he answered him, 'Yes, father, thanks to your prayers'<sup>1</sup>. We can see that here the Jesus prayer is to be repeated continuously, unlike in the recommendation of Barsanuphius. There is a certain fluidity in its formula. There is no indication that the usage of the prayer was widespread, on the contrary, it seems to be a part of παράδοσις from Dorotheos.

Another important piece of evidence is a narrative, published by Nicodemus the Hagiorite under the title '*The Most Profitable Narrative of Abba Philemon*'. Its exact date is uncertain. Hausherr dates it between the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. The narrative contains two passages where the Jesus prayer is mentioned. Answering the question of a disciple 'What is inner meditation (κρυπτὴ μελέτη)?' Abba Philemon replies: 'Keep watch in your heart; and with watchfulness say in your mind with awe and trembling: 'Lord

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<sup>1</sup> As there is no English translation of the text available, we have used that of Hausherr in *Name*. p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> *Name*. p. 273.



Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me.’ For this is the advice the Blessed Diadochus gave to the beginners’. Later on the Abba again instructs his disciple saying: ‘Without interruption, whether asleep or awake, eating, drinking or in company, let your heart inwardly and mentally at times be meditating on the psalms, at other times be repeating the prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me’. A few observations may be made about these passages:

First of all, the formula of the Jesus prayer is flexible. Secondly, Abba Philemon refers to the authority of Diadochus precisely on account of his teaching on the Jesus prayer. However, the Jesus prayer corresponds to the earlier stages of ‘cleansing the intellect’. Apparently, Philemon himself did not use it. The prayer is non-verbal (but not superior to verbal) and equal to meditation on the Psalms. Finally, ‘awe and trembling’ is same expression which is later used in the same narrative to illustrate the preparation to receive communion. Thus, Jesus prayer signifies union with God, comparable to the Eucharist.

Thus, we can see that by the time of Climacus the Jesus prayer has not only emerged, but also gained some popularity and significance. From the internal and external evidence we believe that Climacus does speak about the Jesus prayer in some form.

### ***Pure prayer***

The term ‘pure prayer’ has two connotations: prayer free from distractions and imageless prayer.

Climacus himself uses the term to describe the ability to pray without being distracting by other subjects, thus it is impossible to attain to pure prayer

(προσεύξεται καθαρῶς) while being avaricious (16.7 = 16.7 = 924D). Likewise, 'a non-possessive man is pure during prayer, but an acquisitive man prays to material images' (17.4 = 16.12 = 928B).

In respect to distractions Climacus' position is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, 'God does not require from those still under obedience prayer completely free from distractions. Do not be despondent when your thoughts are plundered, but take courage, and unceasingly recall your mind. Inviolability is proper only to an angel' (4.92 = 4.88 = 713D). On the other hand, 'by distractions demons bring our prayer to nothing' (4.101 = 4.101 = 717A). Prayer without distraction is not a result of a mental technique, or simply of concentration and ascetic effort, but mainly of love to God. 'For what have I in heaven? Nothing. And what have I desired on earth beside Thee? Nothing, but to cling continually to thee in prayer without distractions' (28.25 = 28.28 = 1133C, cf. Evagrius *De Or.* 118), writes Climacus, linking the notions of unceasing prayer and of pure prayer. Mark the Monk also emphasises that prayer without distractions cannot be achieved by any ascetic technique: 'undistracted prayer is a sign of love for God', and therefore 'prayer comprises the complete fulfilment of commandments; for there is nothing greater than love of God' (*Justif.* 96, 97). Likewise, Maximus the Confessor also believes that 'the man that truly loves God certainly prays completely undistracted; and he that certainly prays completely undistracted also truly loves God.' (*Cap. Carit.* II. 1)

As far as the essence of prayer is concerned, there is a similarity in definitions between Evagrius and Climacus. While the first defines it as 'the rejection of concepts (ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων)' (*De Or.* 70), the definition of prayer by the second is even more embracing in its apophaticism: 'estrangement

(ἀλλοτριώσις) from the world, visible and invisible' (28.25 = 28.28 = 1133C). Therefore, 'he who wishes to present his mind pure (νοῦν καθαρὸν) to God, and is agitated by cares (φροντίσι δονούμενος), is like a man who has tied his legs tightly together and then expects to walk briskly' (27.53 = 27-2.19 = 1112A). Note the similarity of terminology with Evagrius: 'You will not be able to pray purely if you are all involved with material affairs and agitated with unremitting concerns (φροντίσι συνεχέσι δονούμενος)' (*De Or.* 70). Again, Evagrius uses the expression νοῦς καθαρός more than once (*Ad Mon.* 107, *De Mal. Cog.* 24, *Ex. Prov. Sal.* 80.15, 122.6,8,16, *Sch. in Prov.* 31, 375, 376, 378), and it seems to be coined by Origen (*Frag in Ps.* 138. 14-16, 43, *Exp. In Prov.* PG 17. 168C, 169A, 252A), to be also taken up by Maximus the Confessor (*Ad Thass. prol.* 10, 55). Both Evagrius and Climacus agree that such an understanding of prayer leads to an affirmation of the practical need to reject any images or concepts. Evagrius writes: 'When you are praying do not fancy the Divinity like some image formed within yourself. Avoid also allowing your spirit to be impressed with the seal of some particular shape, but rather, free from all matter, draw near the immaterial Being and you will gain understanding' (*De Or.* 66). Climacus follows him closely: 'Do not admit any sensory fantasies during prayer lest you become subject to derangement' (28.42 = 28.44 = 1136D – 1137A).

Evagrius' insistence on formlessness and imagelessness in prayer may be appreciated in the context of anthropomorphic controversy. This theology of prayer was a logical expression of the faith that 'God is without quantity and without all outward form (ἄποσον δὲ τὸ Θεῖον, καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον)' (*De Or.* 67).

Azovkin points to a striking detail: while Climacus insists on imageless prayer, he recommends: ‘Do not cease to picture and scrutinize the dark abyss of external fire, and the merciless servants, the uncompassionate and inexorable judge, the bottomless pit of subterranean flame, the narrow descents to the awful underground chambers and yawning gulfs, and all such things’ (7.10 = 7.12 = 804C)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, a similar exhortation may be found in Evagrius, in spite of his similar insistence on imageless prayer. He recommends: ‘sit in your cell, and concentrate your intellect; remember the day of death, visualize (ἰδε) the dying of your body ... Call to mind, also, what is even now going on in hell. Think of the suffering, the bitter silence, the terrible moaning, the great fear and agony, the dread of what is to come, the unceasing pain, the endless weeping’ (*Rer. Mon. Rat.* 9). If we want to understand this apparent contradiction, it is important to realize that prayer and remembrance of death are similar not in their *nature*, but in their *effect* – concentration and μνήμη Θεοῦ.

### ***Preternatural experiences***

Although the notions of rapture, ecstasy and vision of light do appear in the *Scala*, they occupy no prominent place in Climacus’ theology. He seems to avoid them consciously, hinting at them and immediately stepping back, as if refusing to dwell on them any further. As we shall see, this is one of the distinctive characteristics of the *Scala* in comparison with some other writers. Rarely does Climacus describe anything other than a means of attaining spiritual integrity, omitting descriptions of what nowadays would be classified as ‘mystical experience’. Nevertheless, as these concepts do appear, they need to be examined within the framework of the patristic tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hesychios*. p. 182.

Identifying three degrees of prayer, Climacus states that ‘the perfection of prayer is rapture (άρπαγή) in the Lord’ (28.19 = 28.20 = 1132D). Again, one of the ‘signs, courses and proofs’ of ήσυχία is ‘rapture (άρπαγή) towards the Lord’ (27.37 = 27-2.6 = 1108A). What precisely does he mean by άρπαγή and is it in any way different from έκστασις?

The word itself certainly recalls 2 Cor. 12, where Paul describes how he was caught up (άρπαγέντα) to the third heaven. In the discourse on ήσυχία Climacus directly refers to Apostle Paul, who is said to have been ‘caught up into Paradise as into stillness’ (έν παραδείσῳ ὡς έν ήσυχία ήρπάγη) (27.26 = 27-2.23 = 1100C). In the same discourse he recalls 2 Cor. 12.2 ff once again when describing his conversation with an angel (27.47 = 27-2.13 = 1109C), repeating after the Apostle: ‘Whether I was then with this clay, I know not; or out of it, I am quite unable to say’.

Together with άρπαγή Climacus uses the notion of έκστασις. Climacus uses the term, describing a monk conversing with demons before his death (7.50 = 7.50 = 812 C). One of the definitions he gives for a monk is that he experiences unceasing ecstasy (ἀδιάστατος έκστασις) of mind (23.24 = 22.22 = 969A). Ecstasy is linked with illumination: in έκστασις the mind is transported to Christ in noetic light (έν φωτι νοερῳ). According to Climacus, this happens ‘ineffably and unspeakably’ (άρρήτως καί άφράστως) (26.142 = 26-2.27 = 1065A).

Thus, we can see a certain degree of flexibility in Climacus’ usage of έκστασις. Considering his brief descriptions of έκστασις, it is difficult to see how it can be unceasing. Most likely, Climacus uses this word to illustrate the estrangement from the body (as he does in 7.50 = 7.50 = 812 C) and the intensity of prayer. This flexibility of the term έκστασις becomes even more apparent

when we see that on some occasions he uses it in a negative sense, usually in a meaning of derangement (3.26 = 3.37 = 669C, 15.27 = 15.23 = 884C, 21.5 = 20.4 = 945B, 27.36 = 27-2.5 = 1108A, 28.42 = 28.44 = 1137A).

The terms ἀρπαγή and ἔκστασις do not appear to be different in their meaning within the *Scala*. Once he uses both terms interchangeably in his discourse on ἀπάθεια: it ‘sanctifies the mind and detaches (ἀφαρπάζει) it from the material things, that for a considerable part of life in the flesh, after entering the heavenly harbour, a man is rapt (ἐξεστηκότα) as though in Heaven and is raised to θεωρία’ (29.5 = 29.3 = 1148C).

So, what can be said about the meaning and importance of ecstatic prayer in Climacus? As C. Stewart points out, ‘the very nature of ecstatic prayer hinders attempts to describe or define it’<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, a few things may be said. First, as for many other authors, it signifies the highest degree of prayer, characterised by the loss of self-awareness. Secondly, the experience is described in apophatic terms. Thirdly, it may be associated with vision of demons or angels. Fourthly, it is associated with vision of light, a theme which we will examine next.

As has been shown by H. Alfeyev, ecstasy occupies a prominent place in patristic spiritual tradition<sup>2</sup>. The notion appears in the New Testament (Acts 10.9-16 (ἔκστασις) and 2 Cor. 12.1-10 (ἀρπαγή)). The four characteristics of ecstatic prayer in Climacus are commonly encountered in Patristic writings. Macarius of Egypt speaks of ἔκστασις as being the highest degree of prayer (*Coll. H* 8.1-3), while Barsanuphius stresses that it is love for God that makes one experience the state same as that of Paul (2 Cor. 12), and although it signifies

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart. *Cassian*. p.116

<sup>2</sup> *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Ch. IX.4 See also an article *Extase*. II. *Extase chez les Pères de l'Église*. by J. Kirchmeyer in DS. Vol 4. pt. 2 cols. 2087-2113 and Stewart. *Cassian*. pp. 116-122.

the highest stage of perfection, it is by no means impossible to achieve (*Corr.* 186). Like Cassian (*Conl.* IX.XXV.1), Diadochus describes the loss of self-awareness in ecstatic prayer. He defines knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) as ‘to lose awareness of oneself through going out to God in ecstasy (ἀγνοεῖν ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῷ ἐκστῆναι Θεῷ)’ (*Def.*). Later he describes the intensity of love (ἔρως) of God, which brings one to a state, in which he ‘no longer knows himself, but is completely transformed (ἡλλοιωμένος) by the love of God. He is both present in this life and not present in it: still dwelling in his body, he yet departs from it, as through love he ceaselessly journeys towards God in his soul. His heart now burns constantly with the fire of love and clings to God with irresistible longing (πόθος), since he has once and for all transcended (ἐκστὰς) self-love in his love for God’ (*Cap. Gnost.* 14). Later on, again, Diadochus says that in such a state ‘the soul is aware of nothing except what it is moving towards’ (*Ibid.* 33). Climacus’ description of such experience as being ‘ineffable and unspeakable’ reminds one of Cassian’s epithets of ecstasy as ‘ineffable’, ‘unutterable’ and ‘unspeakable’<sup>1</sup>. Climacus’ usage of ἔκστασις in connection with the vision of angels and demons (particularly the latter) recalls the narrative in *Vita Antonii*, where Anthony having ‘felt himself carried off in the spirit (ἥσθετο ἑαυτὸν ἀρπαγέντα τῇ διανοίᾳ)’ saw himself from the outside surrounded by demons and angels. While the first accused him of various transgressions, the latter protected him (65).

In Cassian (*Conl.* IX.XXV.1, XXVII) and Macarius ecstasy and a vision of light are directly linked. Macarius enumerates various forms of vision of the Divine light in ecstasy: ‘To some ... the sign of the cross has appeared in light

<sup>1</sup> See Stewart. *Cassian*. p. 118. and pp. 211-212 nn. 39-41.

and fastened itself upon the inward man ... At another time there was brought as it were a shining garment, such as there is none on earth in the course of this world, nor is it possible for human hands to make the like; as for the Lord went up into the mountain with Peter and John, He changed the fashion of His raiment and made it to flash with light, so was it with this garment, and the man who was clothed with it wondered and was amazed. Another while, the light shining in the heart disclosed the inner, deeper, hidden light, so that the man, swallowed up in that sweetness of the contemplation, was no longer master of himself, but was like a fool or a barbarian to this world by reason of the surpassing love and sweetness, by reason of its hidden mysteries' (*Coll. H* 8.3).

It must be said that none of the authors above speak about such ecstatic prayer as being continuous. Macarius, on the contrary, emphasises the transience of such a state: if it was not transient, one would be incapable of any activity, but could only 'sit in the corner, aloft and intoxicated (μετέωρον καὶ μεμεθυσμένον)' (*Ibid.* 8.4). Thus, when Climacus speaks about unceasing ἔκστασις, he should not be interpreted literally. Most likely he means detachment from the body and the world, and, at the same time, concentration on God.

The long quotation from Macarius above brings us to the theme of the mystical vision of light, which occupies an important place in the Patristic spiritual tradition<sup>1</sup>. What is the place of Climacus in this tradition? He uses the language of fire and light quite often. It is not always clear when he merely uses fire and light as images, and when he uses this language to describe mystical

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<sup>1</sup> The development of this theme in the patristic tradition during the first ten centuries is covered by Alfeyev. *Symeon*. Ch. IX.4



experience. With a certain degree of relativity the fire/light passages may be classified into two corresponding categories.

‘A monk is he who keeps his body in chastity, his mouth pure and his mind illumined (πεφωτισμένος νοῦς)’ (1.4 = 1.10 = 633).’ Climacus speaks about the ‘light in the eye of the heart’ that has to be ‘unfailing’ (ἄληκτον) (23.26 = 22.22 = 969A), Addressing John, Abbot of Raithou, John writes: ‘the eye of your mind is pure and free from everything earthly and from the dark overclouding of the passions so that it turns unhindered to the divine light and is illumined by it.’ Humility and obedience enable one to experience the ‘sweetness of divine light’ (4.31 = 4.26 = 696D), which, in its turn, is caused by humility (25.3 = 25.3 = 989A). The purpose of bodily and spiritual vigil is to receive light in heart (20.20 = 19.13 = 941D). At later stages virtues are practiced ‘with love and with divine fire’ (1.16 = 1.29 = 637C). Climacus speaks about ‘a fire of prayer consuming the material’ (5.42 = 5.29 = 780D). The purpose of the spiritual struggle is to make ‘the celestial fire’, which consumes the passions (26.7 = 26.7 = 1013CD, 26.63 = 26.40 = 1025D), to dwell within one’s soul (1.9 = 1.18 = 636C).

On some other occasions it is even more likely that Climacus speaks about the actual experience of the vision of light, as his language suggests. The purpose of mourning is to attain to the vision of ‘the ineffable (ἄρρητός) light’ (7.38 = 7.39 = 808D), ‘the shining of the immaterial light which radiates beyond any fire’ (7.10 = 7.12 = 804C). ‘The friend of silence draws near to God, and by secretly conversing with Him, is enlightened by God’ (11.5 = 11.4 = 852C). ‘The really obedient man often suddenly becomes radiant and exultant during prayer’ (19.4 = 18.4 = 937C). On one occasion Climacus links the theme of the vision of light with ecstasy, when he describes rapture (ἔκστασις), which ‘ineffably and

unspeakably brings the mind to stand before Christ in noetic light' (26.142 = 26-2.27 = 1065A). Addressing John, Abbot of Raithou, Climacus writes; 'You have ascended the mountain and in a thorny place inaccessible to beasts you have seen God and enjoyed the Divine voice and illumination' (*Ad Past.* 100 = 1204A). 'The fragrance of the Fire from on high makes one seek solitude (11.11 = 11.9 = 852D). 'When the fire comes to dwell in the heart, it revives prayer, and after its resurrection and ascension into heaven, a descent of fire into the cenacle of the soul takes place' (28.45 = 28.47 = 1137A). The typology here suggests that Climacus identifies this fire with God, although he does not articulate it clearly. In regards to light he is more articulate: 'Purity of heart has received illumination (ἐλλαμψις). Illumination is an ineffable activity (ἄρρητος ἐνέργεια) which is unknowingly perceived and invisibly seen (νοουμένη ἀγνώστως, καὶ ὁρωμένη ἀοράτως)' (7.55 = 7.53 = 813B). As on this occasion Climacus alludes to "Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God" (Mt 3.8), it seems that he suggests that the vision of light is the experience of God Himself – a theme, which Climacus does not expound on to the same extent as his heirs Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas. We can however conclude with certainty from Climacus' language that the light which he speaks about is a Divine light. Thus, he belongs to the same mystical tradition as Macarius, Diadochus, and, later, Symeon the New Theologian, to name just a few prominent writers.

Diadochus on a number of occasions describes the 'inexpressible light' and the state of illumination which cannot be put into words (*Cap. Gnost.* 8,9,67). In a number of instances, he makes it clear when the intellect sees its own light

(*Ibid.* 40,59), an Evagrian (*Gnost.* 45, *Praktikos* 64) distinction, which Climacus does not articulate, as we have said earlier.

We have already looked at Macarius' exposition of experiencing the Divine light in its various modes. His interpretation of Ez. 1 in *Homily* 1, where he describes the enlightenment of the soul by God, is too lengthy and well known to be quoted. Later on he says that it is God himself who appears to the souls in light, 'that He, the invisible, might be seen by them, He, the impalpable, be felt, after the subtlety of the soul's nature – and that they might feel His sweetness, and enjoy in real experience the goodness of the light in that ineffable enjoyment' (*Coll. H* 4.11).

As in the case of ecstasy, we can see that Climacus prefers not to deal with mystical experiences of light at length, like some other authors. He hints at them in short apophthegms, leaving it to the reader to unveil the precise meaning of his words. 'If you have learned the art of prayer scientifically, you cannot fail to know what I have said' (27.21 = 27.20 = 1100B) – this seems to be the attitude of Climacus towards many subjects he talks about in the *Scala*.

How important is this experience for Climacus? He states that salvation can be achieved without 'prophesies and lights (ἐλλάμψεων), without signs and wonders', but not without humility (25.52 = 25.47 = 1000B). By saying this, and by listing enlightenment with prophesies and wonders, Climacus states that this is the experience of the few (cf. 26.91 = 26.64 = 1033B: an 'increase and abundance of the Divine light' is 'for the perfect'), which is not vital for salvation. In this respect he seems to be somewhat less categorical than Diadochus, who wrote, that no one who has not had experience of the light of the

Holy Spirit could be said to have acquired spiritual love, as through this light the mind receives divine likeness, being made like God (*Cap. Gnost.* 89).

## **ANGELS AND DEMONS**

### **Introduction**

Almost fifty years ago a paper ‘Angels and Demons in the Eastern Orthodox Spiritual Tradition’ was given by B. Krivoshein at a Symposium of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. It was published in 1954 and has not been reprinted since<sup>1</sup>. In the notes to the paper, omitted in the English edition, Krivoshein regrets that he is not aware of any monograph, dedicated to the subject of patristic angelology and demonology<sup>2</sup>. Although no single monograph on the subject has appeared, some scholarly work has been done on the subject since. R. Greenfield’s monograph ‘*Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*’ deals extensively with Climacus’ contemporaries and predecessors, because, as the author fairly observes, ‘the literature ... that was written prior to the late Byzantine period was in fact that with which people at the time would have been familiar’<sup>3</sup>. J.K.Coyle and R. Valantasis also have helpful discussions of early monastic demonology<sup>4</sup>. C. Mango, devoting a chapter to ‘The invisible world of good and evil’<sup>5</sup>, provides a balanced introduction to how the Byzantines

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<sup>1</sup> B. Krivoshein. *Angels and Demons in the Eastern Orthodox Church*. In: *The Angels of Light and the Powers of Darkness*. Ed. E.L. Mascall. London 1954. pp. 22-46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ангелы и бесы в духовной жизни по учению восточных Отцов*. Москва, Русский Путь. 2000. p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> J.K. Coyle. *Early Monks, Prayer and the Devil*. In: *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*. Ed. by P. Allen, R. Canning and B.J.Caiger. Australian Catholic University. pp. 229-249, R. Valantasis. *Demons and Perfecting of the Monk's Body: Monastic Anthropology, Daemonology and Asceticism*. *Semeia* 58 pt. 2, 1992. pp. 47-79.

<sup>5</sup> C.A.Mango. *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980. pp. 151-165.

saw themselves in relation to the invisible world. 'Life on earth', he concludes, 'was thus lived on two levels, the visible and the invisible, of which the latter was by far more significant'<sup>1</sup>. As far as the paper of Krivoshein is concerned, he only takes into consideration four sources: *Vita Antonii*, Evagrius, *Macarian Homilies* and Diadochus. The lack of references is also less than helpful.

While it would be impossible to fill in this gap by this chapter, we shall attempt to identify the main traits in Climacus' angelology and demonology in comparison to the earlier tradition.

In his view on angels and demons Climacus is faithful to the earlier tradition both in terminology and meaning. Although there is no strict angelology and demonology in codified form in patristic teaching, the consent of all the Fathers is that angels and demons are not symbols, but distinct beings, participating in the spiritual life of an individual. The clearest illustration to this are the illuminations in the manuscripts of the *Scala*, which, as J.R. Martin has pointed out, 'provide an insight into the psychology of asceticism'<sup>2</sup>: monks are shown climbing the ladder to Christ, and, while angels stretch their hands to assist their ascent, monks are being thrown down by demons into the abyss.

In the beginning of the *Scala* Climacus defines angels as νοεραὶ καὶ ἄσώματα οὐσίαι' (1.1 = 1.2 = 632B), then as 'ἄσώματα φύσεις' (15.1 = 15.2 = 880D). This is conventional terminology, used by, for example, Gregory of Nyssa (e.g. *Or. Cat.* 6)<sup>3</sup> or Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep. Evang.* 3.10.11). Macarius of Egypt talks about the νοεραὶ οὐσίαι of angels, human beings and demons (*Coll. H* 16.1 = *Coll. B* 46.1.1), while John of Damascus ascribes to

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> *Illustration.* p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> For Gregory of Nyssa's teaching on angels see В.И. Несмелов. *Догматическая система святого Григория Нисского*. St Petersburg, 2000. pp. 309-325.

them ἀσώματος οὐσία (*Inst. Elem.* 7. 39-40). Maximus the Confessor also speaks about νοερά οὐσία, shared by humans, angels and demons (*Cap. de Car.* 3.26). Thus, according to the Fathers, man belongs to a spiritual (νοερός) reality, as well as to the material one. In this reality he is not alone, moreover, according to Climacus, a soul is ὁμοούσιος to angels and demons (26.172 = 26.2-54 = 1072C).

Belief in other spiritual beings is not peculiar to Christianity. What is peculiar to Christianity is the ethical dimension of the reality, which man enters through prayer. According to Macarius of Egypt, 'There is earth on which the beasts dwell, and there is a land in the air, in which the birds walk and live ... In the same way there is a Satanic earth and home, where the powers of darkness and the spirits of wickedness live and walk and take their pleasure, and there is a luminous earth of the Godhead, where the camps of angels and holy spirits walk and take pleasure. That darksome earth cannot be seen with the eyes of the body or felt; neither is the luminous earth of the Godhead felt, or seen by fleshly eyes. But to those who are spiritual (τοῖς δὲ πνευματικοῖς) both are visible to the eye of the soul<sup>1</sup>, that Satanic earth of darkness and the luminous earth of light.' (*Coll. B* 14.31.1 similar to *Coll. H* 14.4). When this happens, man becomes involved in the antagonistic struggle, which began long before he came into existence. It is the human heart which becomes the venue for this struggle. To quote the same author, 'the heart itself is but a little vessel, and yet there are dragons, and there are lions, and there venomous beast, and all treasures of wickedness; and there are rough uneven ways, there are chasms; there likewise is God, there the angels, there is life and the kingdom, there light and the apostles, there the heavenly

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<sup>1</sup> *Coll. H*: 'of the heart'

cities, there the treasures, there is all' (*Coll. B* 43.7 similar to *Coll. H* 14.4). The Fathers understood spiritual life largely in terms of this struggle, in which man finds himself between angelic help and demonic lure. The *Apophthegmata* mention how Abba Moses saw in a vision 'hordes of demons flying about and making a noise before launching an attack. Then Abba Isidore said to him, 'Look towards the east.' He turned and saw an innumerable multitude of the holy angels shining with glory. Abba Isidore said, 'See these are sent by the Lord to the saints to bring them help, while those in the west fight against them. Those who are with us are more in number than they are' (*Alph. Moses* 1). To Climacus this presents a problem which he does not resolve: 'One thing astonishes me very much: Why do we so quickly and easily incline to the passions, when we have Almighty God, angels and saints, to help us towards the virtues, and only the wicked demon against us? I do not wish to speak about this in more detail; in fact, I cannot' (26.134 = 26-2 = 1064A).

The struggle lasts one's entire life, and does not even stop during sleep. Angels and demons also have their share in it, and the necessity of discernment is emphasized: 'Demons often transform themselves into angels of light and take the form of martyrs, and make it appear to us during sleep that we are in communication with them. Then, when we wake up, they plunge us into joy and conceit. But you can detect their deceit by this very fact. For angels reveal torments, judgements and separations; and when we wake up we find that we are trembling and sad ... But if despair afflicts you, then such dreams are also from demons' (3.29 = 3.42-45 = 672AB). The notion of 'demonic joy' appears once again later on: 'some of the unclean demons instruct us in the interpretation of the Divine Scriptures ... We can recognize this diabolical theology, or, rather,

battologia, by the disturbances and the confused and unholy joy (χαρᾶς διακεχυμένης καὶ ἀσέμνου) which are felt in the soul during the instruction.’ (26.152 = 26-2.36 = 1065D – 1068A).

Later on, Climacus gives a somewhat different criterion to identify demonic intervention: ‘In the presence of an invisible spirit, the body becomes afraid; but in the presence of an angel, the soul of the humble is filled with joy’ (21.12 = 20.11 = 948A). Earlier on, he applies this specifically to dreams: ‘When we rise from sleep in a good and peaceful mood, we are being secretly encouraged by the holy angels, especially if we went to sleep with much prayer and watching. But sometimes we rise from sleep in a bad mood, and this is a result of evil dreams and visions’ (15.69 = 15.69 = 896B). It may seem that Climacus contradicts himself, as joy can be a sign of both angelic and demonic presence, but in this case he is simply cautious regarding dreams and encourages his readers to have same attitude. Otherwise he shares his outlook with earlier authors: Evagrius, another monastic exponent of ‘dream theology’, also distinguishes between ἐνύπνιον ἀγγελικὸν and ἐνύπνιον δαιμονιώδες: ‘An angelic dream gladdens the heart; a demonic dream agitates it’ (*Ad Mon.* 52). Distinguishing between good and bad φαντασῖαι, Macarius gives similar criteria. Even if Satan shows ‘something light’ (τινὰ λαμπρὰ), the soul ‘is spitting and feels disgust’ (ἀποπτύεται καὶ ἀηδίζεται), while Divine action is associated with ‘sweetest taste’ (*Coll. B* 5.4.1-4). Diadochus has a similar criterion: ‘The dreams which appear to the soul through God’s love are unerring criteria of truth. Such dreams do not change from one shape to another; they do not shock our inward sense, resound with laughter or suddenly become threatening. But with great gentleness they approach the soul and fill it with spiritual gladness. As a result, even after



the body has woken up, the soul longs to recapture the joy given to it by a dream. Demonic fantasies, however, are just the opposite ... There are, however, times when even good dreams do not bring joy to the soul, but produce in it a sweet sadness and tears unaccompanied by grief' (*Cap. Gnost.* 37). The last remark is similar to Climacus: while dreams from God are not necessarily joyful, dreams which result in grief and depression certainly come from demons.

Climacus seems to have only two sources of dreams: demons and angels. Evagrius, however, suggests three sources of dreams: the activity of angels, demons or of our own images, which are preserved in memory. As demons arouse memory through passions, consequently those who have achieved dispassion no longer experience demonic fantasies (*De Mal. Cog.* 4). Likewise, Diadochus suggests that dreams are 'generally nothing more than images of our wandering thoughts' (*Cap. Gnost.* 38), something more in line with contemporary psychology. Perhaps Climacus would not disagree with these definitions, but undoubtedly he wanted his readers to be cautious about their dreams.

Climacus associates a particular temptation with dreams: 'The demons of vainglory prophesy in dreams. Being unscrupulous, they guess the future and foretell it to us. When these visions come true, we are amazed; and we are elated with the thought (λογισμός) that we are already near to the gift of foreknowledge ... Being a spirit, he (the demon) sees what is happening in the lower air (τὰ ἐντὸς τοῦ ἀέρος), and noticing that someone is dying, he foretells it through dreams to the more light-minded. But the demons know nothing about the future from foreknowledge.' (3.28 = 3.39-41 = 669C-672A). This is a part of the traditional desert demonology. *Vita Antonii* ascribes this demonic capacity to

the fact that they have 'lighter bodies' 31-33. Likewise, Evagrius denies that demons themselves have any foreknowledge, and says that they present in dreams only something they have seen happening. For example, to a monk they could show another monk who is away, or who is on his way to pay a visit (*Ad Eulog.* 30-31). *Apophthegmata*, too, mentions the possibility of demons showing visions (φαντασίαι) of things, which turn out to be true, although not meaning specifically dreams (*Alph.* Anthony 12). Cassian illustrates this belief with a story of a monk who was deluded by such demonic visions to such an extent that he eventually became a Jew and was circumcised (*Conl.* II.VIII). John of Damascus also discusses these demonic capacities in similar terms (*Exp. Fid.* 2.4). There is a lengthy discussion of the matter in Augustine's *De Divinatione Daemonum*. According to Augustine, demons do not have any foreknowledge by nature, but 'future events ... they recognise through natural signs which cannot reach the senses of men' (5.9). Furthermore, 'the nature of demons is such, that, through the sense perception belonging to the aerial body, they readily surpass the possessed by earthly bodies, and in speed, too, because of the superior mobility of the aerial body, they incomparably excel not only the movements of men and beasts but even the flight of the birds' (3.7).

Speaking about angels and demons, there is yet another theme, which is not to be disregarded, that is, the notion of what would later be called 'toll-houses'. The term (not a happy choice, but now an accepted one) signifies that a soul encounters angels and demons after death, receiving support from the first and being hindered and obstructed by the latter. The 'toll-houses' have become an important component (although never dogmatised) of the Orthodox view of the afterlife, particularly in Slavonic tradition through the *Life* of St Basil the New,

which includes an account of the after-death journey of St Theodora. How developed was this notion in Patristic literature? In Climacus it occurs twice. The reader of the *Scala* encounters it for the first time in the introductory letter of John, Abbot of Raithu, addressed to John Climacus. There he speaks about ‘passing unhindered the spirits of wickedness, and the world-rulers of darkness, and the princes of the air’. Abbot John alludes to Eph. 2.2 and 6.12. In fact, belief that air is inhabited by demons was widespread in Byzantium, and it gave foundation for a belief in ‘toll-houses’<sup>1</sup>. A similar expression occurs in the *Scala*, where the prisoners ask: ‘Will our soul pass through the irresistible water of the spirits of the air (τῶν πνευμάτων τοῦ ἀέρος)?’ (5.22 = 5.5 = 773A). Later on, Climacus describes a certain Stephen, who, at the point of death, ‘went into ecstasy of mind, and with open eyes he looked to the right and left of his bed, and, as if he were being called to account by someone, in the hearing of all the bystanders, he said: ‘Yes indeed, that is true; but that is why I fasted for so many years.’ And then again: ‘Yes, it is quite true; but I wept and served the brethren.’ And again: ‘No, you are slandering me.’ And sometimes he would say: ‘Yes this is true. Yes, I do not know what to say to this. But in God there is mercy.’ And it was truly an awful and horrible sight – this invisible and merciful inquisition’ (7.50 = 7.50 = 812 CD). The quotation below from the *Apophthegmata* may be read as a commentary to Climacus’ account: ‘What fear, what trembling, what uneasiness will there be for us when our soul is separated from the body. Then indeed the force and strength of the adverse powers come against us, the rulers of darkness, those who command the world of evil, the principalities, the powers

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<sup>1</sup> See R.P.H. Greenfield. *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology*. Amsterdam: Adolf. M. Hakkert, 1988. pp. 15-18. see also G. Every. *Toll Gates on the Air Way*. In: *Eastern Churches Review* 18. 1976. pp. 139-151.

the spirits of evil. They accuse our soul as in a lawsuit, bringing before it all the sins it has committed, whether deliberately or through ignorance, from its youth until the time when it has been taken away. So they stand accusing it of all it has done. Furthermore, what anxiety do you suppose the soul will have at this hour, until sentence is pronounced and gains its liberty. That is its hour of affliction, until it sees what will happen to it. On the other hand, the divine powers stand on the opposite side, and they present the good deeds of the soul. Consider the fear and trembling of the soul standing between them until in judgment it receives the judgment of the righteous judge. If it is judged worthy, the demons will receive their punishment, and it will be carried out by the angels' (*Alph. Theophilus the Archbishop* 4). Few expositions may be found in Macarius of Egypt. To him the 'toll-houses' do not present a difficulty: 'When the soul of a man departs out of the body, a great mystery (μυστήριον) is there accomplished. If it is under the guilt of sins, there come bands of devils, and angels of the left hand, and powers of darkness take over that soul, and hold it fast on their side. No one ought to be surprised at this. If, while alive and in the world, the man was subject and compliant to them, and made himself their bond man, how much more, when he departs out of this world, is he kept down and held fast by them. That this is the case, you ought to understand from what happens on the good side. God's holy servants even now have angels continually beside them, and holy spirits encompassing and protecting them; and when they depart out of the body, the bands of angels take over their souls to their own side, into the pure world, and so they bring them to the Lord; to whom be the glory and might forever.' (*Coll. H* 22.1). The notion recurs a number of times in both Collections H and B<sup>1</sup>. It is

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<sup>1</sup> *Coll. B* 14.15 = *Coll. H* 43.9, *Coll. B* 23.1.13, *Coll. B* 34.3.

also central to the treatise *De Exitu Animi*, ascribed to Cyril of Alexandria (CPG 5258). Among authors close to Climacus in genre, it also occurs in Diadochus (*Cap. Gnost.* 100), and Barsanuphius of Gaza (*Corr.* 219).

However, even in the Orthodox tradition, where the doctrine of 'toll-houses' has mainly found refuge, there is no uniformity in views on it. One of its principal contemporary exponents was Fr Seraphim Rose, who also attempted to reconcile the 'toll-houses' with oriental concepts of the afterlife and contemporary 'out-of-body' experiences<sup>1</sup>. The concept has been severely criticised by M. Azkoul, who considered the 'toll-houses' to be Gnostic, and 'a gross misinterpretation of the Apostolic Tradition'<sup>2</sup>. There is no necessity for us to go into this controversy. It is sufficient to say, that the references of John Climacus to the 'toll-houses' do not exist in isolation, and, as it can be seen from the writings of other authors, the 'toll-houses' seem to have been widely accepted by his time.

We shall now look more closely at specific issues associated with angels and demons.

### *Angels*

As has been pointed out by B. Krivoshein, anyone working with the writings of the Fathers is bound to be struck by the disproportionate attention given to angels and demons. He suggests the following explanation: 'The demons are our enemies, and it is vitally important to know their ways of fighting us and to discern them, whereas the angels are helping us, even if we are

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<sup>1</sup> Seraphim Rose. *The Soul After Death: Contemporary "After-Death" Experiences in the Light of the Orthodox Teaching on the Afterlife*. Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> *Toll-house Myth: The Neo-Gnosticism of Seraphim Rose*. Synaxis Press: Dewdney, B.C., 1996. Introduction.

unaware of it'<sup>1</sup>. This is true: rather than modelling theoretical constructions, the Fathers present their experience in a way which other readers may find helpful, rather than intellectually entertaining.

Climacus is no exception. He speaks little about angels, and only twice speaks about them in 'theological' language: angels 'never cease to advance in love ... are well aware of the wealth of their progress ... will never stop until they reach the seraphim' (27.28 = 27.26 = 1101A, cf. 26.153 = 26-2.38 = 1068B). Further on he speaks about degrees of enlightenment in angels (30.5 = 30.2 = 1156A). The quotation above recalls the angelology of Gregory of Nyssa, who applied the celebrated notion of ἐπέκτασις to both humans and angels: (e.g. *Contra Eunom.* 3.6.73, *Comm. in Cant. Cant.* VI = GNO VI. 174). We see that Climacus not only takes up the outlook of Gregory's angelology, but also interpolates it into his vision of spiritual life<sup>2</sup>.

When we turn to the monastic literature, we find angels fulfilling a wide variety of tasks and duties: teaching (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Anthony 1, Isaac the Theban 1, Sisoës 33), testing (*Ibid.* Agathon 30), protecting from demons (*Ibid.* Macarius the Great 33) or healing (*Historia Monachorum* XIII.8). Angels may be bringing food (*Historia Monachorum* II.9, VIII.6, X.23, XII.14), fanning a monk during sleep (*Apophthegmata Alph.* John the Dwarf 33), or even supplying wood for a fire (Theodoretus *Historia Religiosa* XIII.14). Thus, visibly or invisibly, they participate in the life of the monk.

The theme of a particular interest is that of the guardian angel, to which Climacus refers a number of times. Looking at the *Scala* and earlier writings, we

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<sup>1</sup> *Angels*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> See *Introduction* pp. 30-31 and *Love* p.259.

may ask: does the early patristic tradition have a clear concept of a guardian angel and his function? What is the place of Climacus in this tradition?

References to a guardian angel are scattered throughout the book. Those inhabiting the prison exclaim: 'Have our guardian angels (φύλακες ἄγγελοι) drawn nearer to us, or are they still far from us? And until they come nearer to us, all our labours are futile and useless. For our prayer has not the power of access, nor the wings of access, unless our angels approach it and take it and bring it to the Lord' (5.17 = 5.6 = 769C). Later on Climacus refers to a guardian angel as simply 'φύλαξ': joy in the soul is a sign that 'a good guardian (ὁ ἀγαθὸς φύλαξ)' has come to pray with us (21.12 = 20.11 = 948A). Later on, this idea is repeated: 'If you feel sweetness or compunction at some word of your prayer, dwell on it; for then our guardian angel is praying with us' (28.11 = 28.10 = 1132B)<sup>1</sup>. This recalls Origen: 'the angel himself prays together with the man who is under his charge (ὕπ' αὐτοῦ ἐπιτροπευομένῳ)' (*Contra Celsum* VIII.36).

It is interesting that Climacus defines conscience as 'the word and censure of our guardian angel (τοῦ φύλακος) given to us from the time of baptism'. This is why, Climacus continues, 'the unbaptized do not feel keen, but only indistinct, pangs of remorse in their soul for their bad deeds' (26.564 = 26-3.55 = 1092 AB). This is different from an earlier view: Dorotheos, for example, saw conscience as a kind of φυσικὸς νόμος, which is implanted at creation (*Instr.* III.40). Mark the Monk also defines conscience as 'the book of nature' (φυσικὴ βίβλος) (*Leg.* 187). The same view is shared by Origen (*Comm. ad Rom.* VI 582. PG 14. 1081A) and John Chrysostom (*Ad Pop. Antioch.* 12. 3-4; *Exp. in Ps.* 147.3).

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<sup>1</sup> See also a passing references to guardian angel in 5.30 = 5.12 = 777D.

Although belief in guardian angels is an essential part of patristic angelology, it has not been made a focus of research. We have only found a survey of this teaching in a work over 150 years old, the *Dogmatic Theology* of Metropolitan Macarius<sup>1</sup>, as well as in the entry by J. Duhr in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*<sup>2</sup>. Metropolitan Macarius asks three questions regarding this teaching: who is given a guardian angel and when, does he remain with this person permanently, and what is his service to man. We can see that in his three references to guardian angels Climacus answers all these questions: the guardian angel is given at baptism, he may depart if one transgresses, and he participates in man's prayer, being its mediator.

How similar is this outlook to other patristic writers?

Origen believed that angels participate in the formation of man in his mother's womb (*Comm. in Evang. Joann.* XIII. 326-335). He was clear that 'each one of us has a good angel' (*In Num. Hom.* XX.3,6), and develops a peculiar theory: 'If I am in the Church, no matter how very little I am, my angel enjoys the liberty and the trust always to see "the face of the Father, who is in heaven."<sup>3</sup> But, if I am an outsider, and not a member of that Church ... then my angel does not enjoy the trust of beholding "the face of the Father, who is in heaven" ... If someone entrusted to an angel sins, the angel is disgraced. And the opposite is also true. If someone who was entrusted to an angel, even the least person in the Church, makes progress, it rebounds to the angel's glory. For, according to the merit of those, whose angels they are, the angels will contemplate the face of God either always or never, little or much' (*Hom. in Luc.*

<sup>1</sup> Макарий (Булгаков), митроп. *Православно-догматическое богословие*. St Petersburg. 1883. 2 Vols. Vol. 1, pp. 553-561.

<sup>2</sup> Although some quotations below may be found or referred to in Macarius and DS, we nevertheless have decided to cite them, as some are not readily available to an English-reader.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 18.10.



35.4). Belief that every man has an angel seems to go back to Hermas, who believed that every man has an angel and a demon (*Past. Mand.* 6.2). Origen (*Hom. in Luc.* 35.3, *De Princ.* 3.2.4) and Cassian (*Conl.* VIII.XVII.1, XIII.XII.7), referring to Hermas, hold the same view. Likewise do Gregory of Nyssa, referring to 'the tradition of the Fathers' (*Vita Mosis* II.45), John Chrysostom (*In Ep. ad Col.* I.III. PG 62. 322) and Macarius of Egypt (*Coll. B* 34.3). In a treatise *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*, attributed to Theodoretus of Cyrus, the belief that every person has an angel is also implied (40).

However, there is no uniformity in this respect. For example, John Chrysostom writes: 'At first the angels were according to the number of the nations; but now, not according to the numbers of the nations, but that of the believers ... For each believer (πιστός) hath an angel; since even from the beginning, every one of those that were approved (ἕκαστος ἀνὴρ τῶν εὐδοκίμων) had his Angel, as Jacob says, "The Angel that feedeth me, and delivereth me from my youth"<sup>1</sup>' (*In Ep. ad Col.* I.III PG 62. 322). Thus, he seems to limit guardian angels to believers. So does Basil the Great: 'To each of the faithful (τῶν πιστῶν) is appointed an angel, worthy to see the heavenly father' (*Hom. sup. Psalmos* PG 29. 453A). He repeats this in *Contra Eunomium*: 'with every one of the faithful (τῶν πιστῶν) there is an angel, who, as mentor (παιδαγωγός) and shepherd, watches over (διευθύνοντα) his life (*Lib.* 3 PG 29. 656 B).

Does the guardian angel depart if one drives him away by sin, as Climacus suggests? Again, this seems to be a familiar idea. Basil the Great wrote: 'The angel remains close to all those, who are faithful to the Lord, unless we ourselves

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 48.15,16, nearly.

drive him away by evil deeds. For as bees are driven away by smoke and doves are frightened away by stench, so our angel, who is a guardian of our life, is driven away by lamentable and foul-smelling sin' (*Hom. sup Psalmos* 33.8 PG 29. 364B). Describing a fallen virgin, Palladius explains: 'as her thoughts were occupied in running down others, the guardian of her chastity (ὁ φύλαξ τῆς σωφροσύνης) was absent' (*Historia Lausiaca* 28). A similar expression occurs in Isaac the Syrian: 'Pray that the angel of your chastity does not depart from you' (*Hom.* 3). Again, this can be traced to Origen. In *De Princ.* he wrote: 'Each of the faithful, though he be the least in the Church, is we are told attended by an angel who ... is to be withdrawn from him if by disobedience he becomes unworthy' (II.X.7). In *Comm. in Evang. Mat.* Origen compares the relationship between a man and his wife, warning that one may receive the bill of divorce from his angel if he transgresses (14.21).

### ***Demons***

Climacus makes clear throughout the book, that the spiritual ascent is a struggle not only with one's passions and sinful habits, but also with demons. Climacus exhorts: 'Let us make an effort not only to wrestle with the demons, but also to make war on them' (26.139 = 26-2.24 = 1064B). Monastic life in all its forms is nothing else but a struggle with demons: 'A good general must know precisely the ability and rank of every man under his command, for perhaps there are with him in the troops front-line fighters, and men suited for single combat on behalf of their comrades, who ought to dwell in stillness.' (*Ad Past.* 35 = 1184A) The *Scala* contains innumerable warnings: 'We have very evil, dangerous, cunning and unscrupulous foes ... these foes are strong; they never sleep; they are incorporeal and invisible' (1.24 = 1.44 = 641BC), 'truly

stupendous and incomprehensible' (26.128 = 26-2.14 = 1060D – 1061A), they all seek our destruction (26.85 = 26.37 = 1032A). He calls them 'murderers' (10.11 = 10.13 = 848C), and names the 'fallen day star' as 'a prince of demons' (14.30 = 14.27 = 868D).

How do the demons assault? Climacus describes a wide range of possibilities throughout the book, but usually temptation begins with προσβολή, which is to become a particular passion. Thus, demons usually correspond with vices. Climacus often speaks about the 'demon of ἀκηδία' (13.8 = 13.5 = 860B), the spirit or demon of fornication (15.39 = 15.37 = 888C), the demon of conceit (15.63 = 15.63 = 893B), etc. in a very Evagrian fashion. Climacus states explicitly that those in hermitages suffer from more severe demonic attacks, because demons were expelled into deserts and abysses (15.62 = 15.60 = 893A). This is a traditional concept (see *Historia Monachorum* XXI.9, *Apophthegmata Alph.* Theodora 6, etc) – perhaps it is the victory over the demons of the desert that gave the Abbas of the *Apophthegmata* and the *Historia Lausiaca* the power to expel them<sup>1</sup>.

What is the motive behind demonic attacks? Climacus answers: 'Every satanic conflict in us comes from these three generic causes: from negligence, or from pride, or from the envy (ἐκ φθόνου) of the demons. The first is pitiable, the second is most wretched, but the third is blessed' (26.5 = 26.4 = 1013B). This demonic envy, which Climacus mentions twice (also in 5.26 = 5.5 = 776C), occurs once in *Vita Antonii* (22) in the *Apophthegmata* (*Alph.* Anthony 22). However, in the correspondence of Barsanuphius of John of Gaza the motif of

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<sup>1</sup> On the association of demons and desert see Greenfield. *Traditions*. p. 57. n.202.

demonic envy recurs constantly<sup>1</sup>. It also occurs in Maximus the Confessor (*Cap. Carit.* II.14). It seems that the envy and jealousy of the devil is the same demonic motive as in the Garden of Eden. According to Gregory of Nyssa, Satan, 'seeing that man by the commission of the Divine blessing had been elevated to lofty pre-eminence (for he was appointed king over the earth and all things on it; he was beautiful in his form, being created an image of the archetypal beauty; he was without passion in his nature, for he was the imitation of the unimpassioned; he was full of frankness, delighting in a face-to-face manifestation of the personal Deity), - all this was to the adversary the fuel to his passion of envy (κατὰ τὸν φθόνον πάθους) (*Or. Cat.* 6)<sup>2</sup>.

Climacus only once talks about demons appearing in a visible form (ὁφθαλμοφανῶς) to praise a certain monk (25.12 = 25.12 = 992C). Otherwise he simply warns against demonic apparitions in sleep or a 'waking vision' (καθ' ὕπνον) in a form of an angel or a martyr (23.19 = 22.19 = 968CD). However, although demons belong to a spiritual world, they can, so to speak, intrude into the material realm. For example, Climacus speaks about the demon of ἀκηδία producing 'shivering, headache, and even colic' (13.8 = 13.5 = 860B), producing noises and footsteps, which make a solitary peep out of the window (13.13 = 13.9 = 860D, also 27.20 = 27.19 = 1100A)<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, tempting a monk to sleep, demons produce 'severe, unusual pains in the stomach' or 'fits of yawning' (19.3 = 18.3 = 937B).

Macarius of Egypt believed that Satan 'appears in some image' (φαντάζει παραφαινόμενος ἐν εἰδεσί τισι) only to the beginners

<sup>1</sup> See entry *Envie de demons* in the index of the SC edition.

<sup>2</sup> On the subject of demonic envy see also Greenfield. *Traditions*. pp. 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> For the motif of demons producing noises see Greenfield. *Traditions*. pp. 79-80.

(τοὺς δὲ νηπιωτέρους), assaulting by evil thoughts those who have not achieved perfection, and the perfect with confusion and bafflement (*Coll. B* 5.3.1). However, monastic literature is full of instances of demons materializing in all kinds of forms and images. They may appear in the appearance of Christ (*SBo.* 113, as a youth in full vigour (Theodoretus *Historia Religiosa* XXI.28), as a priest (*Historia Monachorum* XIII.5, Palladius *Historia Lausiaca* 38.11), as a beautiful woman (*Paral.* 24), or nun (*Draguet II* 7,10 (*Koininia.* vol. 2. p. 117-118), as a soldier (Palladius *Historia Lausiaca* 16.2), as a boy (*Ibid.* 16.4), as eagle (*Vita sancti Georgii Chozibitae* 13) or even as a camel loaded with food (*Historia Monachorum* XXI.4). They may be wailing and displaying torches (Theodoretus *Historia* XXI.27, XXVIII.2) and even uprooting 500 trees all at once (*Ibid.* XXVIII.1). They may appear as a Saracen (*Acta Sancti Theognii* 9), as an Ethiopian boy (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Heraclides) or Ethiopian girl (Palladius *Historia Lausiaca* 23.5), they may speak Syriac (Theodoretus *Historia* XXI. 15) or look Egyptian (*Ibid.* XXI.23). In *Historia Monachorum* a demon materialises as a woman, although when it comes to intercourse, she disappears (I.33-35). A demon can even present himself in the image of Christ surrounded by angels (Palladius. *Historia Lausiaca.* 25.4), or appear with a knife, intending to cut off a monk's foot (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Macarius the Great 35)<sup>1</sup>.

Not only were the demons visible; their physical attacks were by no means a rarity. *Vita Antonii* describes how after demonic attacks Anthony was too feeble to stand, and lay on the ground speechless from pain (8-9)<sup>2</sup>. The contemporary academic approach to spirituality predictably presumes that

<sup>1</sup> For the motif of visual apparitions of demons, see Greenfield. *Traditions.* pp. 82- 88.

<sup>2</sup> See also *Sbo.* 21, *Gl.* 18-19, Palladius. *Historia Lausiaca.* 38.12, *Historia Monachorum* 1.40,43, 12.13, 25.3, *Apophth. Alph.* Elias 7, some texts, mainly later ones, referred to in Greenfield. *Traditions.* pp. 77-79.

Anthony found himself in a situation of 'self-imposed sensory deprivation, where one may suspect that hallucination and extreme emotional states were deliberately courted so as to be overcome and not entered into unwittingly and then naively ascribed to the demonic.'<sup>1</sup>

According to Climacus, demons are unable to see the inner life of man: 'Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more freely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared.' (1.22 = 1.39 = 641A). Climacus gives examples of monks, pretending to be sorrowful on account of a disgrace they had undergone, pretending to long for the office of superior, or grieving over the loss of palm-leaves, or even imitating gluttony by gobbling grapes (26.140 = 26-2.25 = 1064BC) in order to deceive the demons. Thus, Climacus expresses belief that demons are unable to see the inner disposition of man, although it can be precisely their purpose 'to make us believe that they also know the thoughts of our hearts' (26.154 = 26-2.39 = 1068 CD). A number of authors before Climacus implicitly articulated the inability of demons to see the inner life of man. In Theodoretus' *Historia Religiosa* demons only find out about the fear of a monk when he speaks about it to his friends (XXI.27). Likewise, the *Apophthegmata* affirms that demons do not initially know by what passion the soul can be overcome and 'sows, but without knowing if he will reap' (*Alph. Mat.* 4, cf. Maximus the Confessor *Cap. Carit.* II.20). Other authors are more explicit. Answering the question 'Does Satan really know *all* thoughts and ideas (τοὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ τὰ νοήματα), Macarius agrees with the *Apophthegmata*,

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brown. *The Making of Late Antiquity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978. p. 89, cf. English translation: Theodoret of Cyrrhus. *A history of the monks of Syria*. Translated, with an introduction and notes, by R. M. Price. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1985 (CS 88). p. 149 n.13.

saying that ‘The tempter tempts, but does not know whether the man will yield or not yield, till such time as the soul gives up its will into bondage’. However, ‘If one man, by being with another, knows about him, and you, who are twenty years old, know the affairs of your neighbour, can Satan fail to know your reasonings? He has been with you from birth. He is six thousand years old<sup>1</sup> ... Nor do I say that the devil knows all the thoughts and devices of our heart.’ (*Coll. H* XXVI.9 similar to *Coll. B* 7.6.1). We find a similar exposition in Evagrius: ‘The demons do not know our heart, as some people think, because there is only One who knows hearts (καρδιογνώστης), knows the mind of men (ὁ ἐπιστάμενος τὸν νοῦν τῶν ἀνθρώπων LXX Job 7.20), and who has alone created their hearts (LXX Ps. 32.15). But by uttered word and movements of body demons know many movements of heart ... every outward movement they observe curiously and leave nothing about us unexplored: neither lying, nor sitting, nor standing, nor a word, nor a journey, nor a glance; everything they observe, everything they make use of’ (*De Mal. Cog.* 27). Likewise, Cassian believes that demons only know our thoughts from ‘external and perceptible indications’ (*Conl.* VII.XV.1). Thus, although demons are unable to see the inner life, Satan is seen as an expert psychologist with a few thousand years of practice and experience. However, not only do demons have centuries of experience in tempting humans, but by the time of Climacus monks had also had a few centuries of experience in resisting demonic attacks, and Climacus writes as an exponent of this experience.

The way to avoid a dualistic understanding of the spiritual struggle is to see it within the scheme of Divine Providence. Thus, ‘as our conflicts increase, so do

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<sup>1</sup> *Coll. B*: ‘Seven thousand years’.

our crowns. He who has never been struck by the enemy will certainly not be crowned' (26.157 = 26-2.42 = 1068D – 1069A, see also 26.s63 = 26-3.54 = 1092A). This is why, according to Climacus, 'there exist certain temptations from wicked and envious spirits which, of their own accord, leave the saints so as to deprive those in battle of any chance of obtaining crowns for victory over them' (26.148 = 26-2.32 = 1065C).

Demons do not have any power of their own. Demons are only allowed to attack a soul as far as the opposition to these attacks may strengthen the soul and confirm its yearning for God. This is something that all the Fathers affirm. 'You are as weak as a child', says Anthony to the devil (*Vita Antonii* 6), later on dedicating a part of his long discourse to the subject of the demonic weakness (*Ibid.* 28-30). He says that demons are cowards (*Ibid.* 35), fierce yet powerless (*Ibid.* 91). The *Apophthegmata* attribute to Anthony the Great the words 'Without temptations no one can be saved' (*Alph.* Anthony 5), while Evagrius thought that 'a heart which does not struggle is deprived of an opportunity to exercise virtue, for the word "virtue" (ἀρετή) is derived from a word, meaning the action of struggle (ἐκ τῶν ἀριστείων πρακτικόν)' (*Ad Eulog.* 3). Palladius describes that when a monk Pachon was smitten by a temptation and decides to be bitten by an asp he suddenly heard a voice: 'Keep up the fight! It was for this reason that I let you be depressed, so that you might not become haughty as a strong person, but rather might know your own weakness, and that you might not trust too much in your own way of life, but rather come running to God for help' (*Historia Lausiaca* 23.6).

An extensive treatment of this subject may be found in the second homily of Macarius of Egypt (*Coll. B*). Answering the question 'What is Satan?', he



describes the him as ‘an edifying rod, or a spurring whip’ (2.3.7,19), a part of the divine providence, whose task is to enable man to strengthen his will towards the good (2.2.8), because ‘it would not be appropriate for rational creatures (τὰ λογικὰ κτίσματα) to remain idle, like logs (ὡς τὰ ξύλα), but it would be appropriate to exercise and to be tested first, and then to receive the prizes’ (2.3.17, see also *Coll. B* 4.6.1-3). Thus, ‘scourged and obstructed by him, they draw to God, seeking His help, they are not held back by his obstacles, but they approach perfection more quickly thanks to their upright and good will, the closer they approach God, the more they are lashed by the evil one’ (2.3.20).

We see that the patristic demonology and angelology was formed in response to concrete issues of the spiritual life. We also see that the demonology of Climacus, as well as of the earlier fathers, is a very practical one. Dionysius the Areopagite is probably the only significant exception. Once again, we see Climacus as an heir to the tradition of the desert. Evagrian influence on Climacus, particularly in his demonology, should not be underestimated. Climacus accepted the entire Evagrian framework: a monk is struggling with λογισμοὶ (*Ad Eulog.* 15), introduced by certain demons, which correspond to certain passions. Both writers expose the tricks of the demons and display how different demons/passions make way for one another. There is no place for speculation: both Evagrius and Climacus summarise the ascetic experience of preceding generations of monks and hand it on to the following generations.

## ***THE THEOLOGY OF MONASTICISM***

In this chapter we intend to look at the theological background to Climacus' presentation of the monastic life, its meaning and the various forms it takes.

### ***Monasticism as martyrdom***

On a number of occasions Climacus applies the language and imagery of martyrdom to the monastic life. What is the significance of the ideal of martyrdom in monastic literature and in Christianity in general? What sense does it make outside the context of historical persecution<sup>1</sup>?

As far as history is concerned, it is well known that monasticism originated before the peace of the Church. Cassian describes the post-apostolic communities of virgin ascetics as the first coenobia (*Conl.* XVIII.V.2). Although this statement may be anachronistic, it is important in that monastic tradition did not see itself as an invention: both Jerome (*Vita Pauli* 1) and Sozomen (*HE* I.12) saw Elias and John the Baptist as the predecessors of monasticism. Anthony, who began his monastic life prior to the persecution, was a disciple of a certain 'old man, who had lived the ascetic life in solitude from his youth' (*Vita Antonii* 3), although 'there were not yet so many monasteries in Egypt, and no monk even knew of the faraway desert. Whoever wished to concern himself with asceticism

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<sup>1</sup> There exists an exhaustive treatment on the subject: E.E. Malone. *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*. The Catholic University of America studies in Christian antiquity 12, 1950, esp. chs. I-III, summarized in 'The Monk and Martyr' *Studia Anselmiana* 30 Rome 1956. For a brief treatment see Ware, K. *The Seed of the Church: Martyrdom as Universal Vocation*. In: Ware, K. *The Inner Kingdom*. Volume 1 of the Collected Works. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's University Press, 2000. pp. 111-125. D. Balfour in *Extended Notions of Martyrdom in the Byzantine Ascetical Tradition*. *Sobornost* 5:1 1983. pp. 20-35 provides a more detailed introduction, particularly referring to the later authors ignored by Malone. G.G. Christofis in *The Notions of Martyrdom According to St. John Chrysostom*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984. pp. 146-184 deals specifically with 'the secondary notions of martyrdom in Chrysostom.

by himself not far from his own village'. Likewise, Pachomius is described as having been a disciple of Palamon<sup>1</sup>. According to Jerome, Paul pursued a monastic life during the persecutions of Decius (250-1) and Valerian (253-260) (*Vita Pauli* 2-4). An interesting piece of evidence comes from Sozomen. Discussing the origins of monasticism, he refers to the opinion that 'this mode of life originated from the persecution for the sake of religion, which arose from time to time, and by which many were compelled to flee to the mountains and deserts and forests, and they became used to this kind of living' (*HE* I.12). As D. Chitty pointed out, 'anachoresis was already in the air in the third century in Egypt – men, sometimes whole communities, withdrawing into deserts or swamps to escape from the intolerable burden of taxation and the public liturgies'<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the mention of σχῆμα in connection with the monastic initiation of Pachomius led Chitty to the reasonable conclusion that the monastic habit went back even before Anthony<sup>3</sup>. The pre-Antonian origins of some Palestinian monastic settlements are also suggested<sup>4</sup>.

If we look at pre-Constantinian theological writings, we can see that the notion of martyrdom was not restricted to the narrow sense of the word. The ideal of martyrdom was to be fulfilled independently of whether one had to suffer and die as a martyr. As Malone points out, both Clement<sup>5</sup>, Origen<sup>6</sup> and Cyprian<sup>7</sup> realized that the Church is not always persecuted, and therefore it is impossible for all Christians to be granted the grace of martyrdom. Thus, Clement of Alexandria writes: 'We call martyrdom perfection, not because the

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<sup>1</sup> *SBo.* 10-18, *GI.* 6-13.

<sup>2</sup> *Desert.* p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Monk.* p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 35-36.

man comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love ... If the confession to God is martyrdom, each soul which has lived purely in the knowledge of God, which has obeyed the commandments, is a witness (μάρτυς) both by life and word, in whatever way it may be released from the body, - shedding faith as blood as its whole life as its departure' (*Strom.* 4.5.14-15). Origen, typically, tried to find a scriptural foundation: 'Let us fight as to bear our witness (not only in public, but also in secret), so as to be able to declare with the Apostle: For our glory is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God<sup>1</sup> ... we have conversed in this world' (*Exhort. ad Mart.* 21). Cyprian of Carthage illustrates how works of charity and readiness to become a martyr form facets of the one Christian ideal. According to Cyprian, Christ in peace 'will give to those who conquer a white crown for their good works; in persecution He will give a second crown, a purple one, for our passion' (*De Op. et El.* 26). 'The rewards of divine promise await not only the persecuted and the slain, but, if passion be wanting to the faithful, yet if the faith has remained sound and unconquered, and, after forsaking and continuing all his possessions, show that he follows Christ, he also is honoured among the martyrs by Christ' (*Ad Fort.* XII).

It is important to see that the early monastic tradition saw itself as a fulfilment of the ideal of martyrdom rather than its substitution. *Vita Antonii* shows that there was no sharp transition from martyrdom to monasticism. When the persecution of Maximin began, Anthony 'had a yearning for martyrdom', and came to Alexandria to support and minister to those preparing for it. After the persecution ended, Anthony returned to his cell and became 'a daily martyr to his

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 12.

conscience (καθ' ἡμέραν μαρτυρῶν τῇ συνειδήσει), ever fighting the battles of the faith' (46). These battles result in bodily affliction: the *Vita* goes on to describe his fasting, wearing a hairshirt inside out, refraining from baths. Earlier on the *Vita* describes his physical injuries inflicted by demons; they were so severe that sometimes he lay on the ground speechless from pain and was thought to be dead (8). The motif of martyrdom in regards to Anthony occurs in the *Apophthegmata* as well. When Anthony the Great was asked by a monk 'What must I do in order to please God?' he replied: 'whatever you do, do it according to the testimony (ἐκ ... τὴν μαρτυρίαν) of the Scriptures (*Alph. Anthony* 3).

Thus, we can even speak of martyrdom as a universal vocation. Not only is this expressed by the early authors we have looked at, but also by later monastic authors. In the words of Isaac the Syrian, 'martyrs are not only those who have accepted death for their belief in Christ, but also those who die for the sake of keeping His commandments' (*Hom.* 3). One can also be a martyr on account of another man: 'On the day when you are pained in some way, either physically or mentally, for the sake of any man, be he good or evil, reckon yourself as a martyr on that day, and as one who suffers for Christ's sake and is deemed worthy of confession' (*Ibid.* 51, cf. 64).

While *Vita Antonii* applies the notion of martyrdom primarily to physical suffering, later authors relate it to the inner life. John Chrysostom relates it particularly to struggle with sexual temptations. 'And how is it possible, you say, to imitate martyrs these days, for it is not time of persecution? I know this: it is not time of persecution, but time of martyrdom, not time of such struggles, but time for crowns, not people pursue, but demons, not a tyrant persecutes, but the

devil, who is harder than all tyrants, you don't see coal in front of you, but the burning fire of passion (ἐπιθυμία) (*In San. Barl. Mart.* PG 50. 677A).

Diadochus describes the sufferings of the soul, which is being deprived of God's sweetness at the outset of spiritual life, so that with effort it may regain it fully and consciously. At the same the soul is subject to severe demonic temptations. The effort is so great, and the suffering so painful, that Diadochus concludes: 'no one can acquire the perfection of love while still in the flesh except for those saints who suffer to the point of martyrdom, and confess their faith despite all persecution' (*Cap. Gnost.* 90). Further on, Diadochus develops this idea: 'We must therefore submit to the Lord's will thankfully; for then our frequent illnesses and our fight against demonic thoughts will be counted a second martyrdom ... In times past he (the devil) tortured the bodies of the saints, inflicting the utmost outrage upon spiritual teachers held in honour by using such people as served his diabolic schemes; and now he attacks the confessors of holiness with the various passions, and with much insult and contempt, especially when for the glory of the Lord they give determined help to the poor and downtrodden. So we should fulfil our inward martyrdom before God with confidence and patience' (*Ibid.* 94). The pain from demonic arrows may well be compared to real arrows (*Ibid.* 97). While Barsanuphius of Gaza also speaks about persecution suffered from the demons (*Corr.* 244), in the *Apophthegmata* the notion of martyrdom appears in connection with obedience (*Alph. Macarius the Great* 33, Pambo 3).

The original meaning of the word 'martyr' is witness. Did monasticism retain this notion? As J. Decarreaux put it, 'if in times of peace that same Church were to run the risk of losing its standards as its adherents became more

numerous, richer and more powerful, a new generation of witnesses would arise to remind the world of the great lessons taught by the pure Gospel'<sup>1</sup>. This is a fair evaluation – the Early Church certainly linked the development of monasticism with a general recession of standards. 'They'll say: is it impossible for those staying at home to practice those virtues, the neglect of which results in such a punishment? I would like, and not less, but more than you, that monasteries no longer to be necessary, and a state of affairs in the cities to be so orderly that no one would need to escape into the desert. But as everything has gone upside down, and cities, where are tribunals and laws, are full of all iniquities and injustice, while the desert produces rich fruits of love of wisdom, justice demands that you do not condemn those who lead out those who wish to be saved and lead them to quiet harbour, but those who make every city unsuitable and incompatible with the love of wisdom, that those who wish to be saved need to run away into the desert' (John Chrysostom *Adv. Opp. Vit. Monast.* I.7 PG 47. 328). However, the point should not be pressed too far. H.B. Workman thought that monasticism was a form of protest against a Church, which had become overinstitutionalized and mixed with the world. As an example, he gives Anthony, who, apparently, 'neither goes to church, nor receives the Sacrament for years, and yet continues in the closest intercession with God'<sup>2</sup>. This is an oversimplification, if only because there is no notion of protest in the *Vita* itself. Neither did Anthony see himself as a revolutionary, nor did Athanasius try to depict him as one. As R. Price points out, 'The notion of monasticism as a protest movement fails finally before the evidence of the actual

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<sup>1</sup> *Monks and Civilisation: From the Barbarian Invasions to the Reign of Charlemagne*. London: Allen&Unwin, 1964.p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal: From the Earliest Times Down to the Coming of the Friars; a Second Chapter in the History of Christian Renunciation*. London: Epworth Press, 1927. p. 14.

attitude of monks towards both the bishops and the laity'<sup>1</sup>. However, in earlier scholarship there existed a certain attitude (now absent from serious scholarship) towards early monasticism which was either sceptical in its evaluation of monastic labours or, on the other hand, exuberant in glorifying the desert fathers as the first Protestants.

Climacus applies the language of confession and martyrdom to monastic life throughout the book. To persist in spiritual struggle means 'to endure a thousand deaths of body and soul' (4.93 = 4.89 = 716A). It is characteristic of Climacus that for him it is always done in connection with obedience and renunciation of will. The path of obedience is 'the arena of spiritual confession' (4.5 = 4.6 = 680B, 4.8 = 4.10 = 681A), in which the monks follow the way of the First Martyr (πρωτομάρτυρος) (4.68 = 4.60 = 709C). Following one's own will means depriving oneself of the confessor's crown (4.107 = 4.107 = 717D). Besides obedience, a monk enduring bad treatment from other monks was ordered to be buried with the saints 'as a confessor' (4.29 = 4.25 = 696A). The same idea is implied on a number of other occasions (4.36 = 4.31 = 700C, 4.44 = 4.37 = 704D). On several occasions when speaking about obedience Climacus employs sacrificial language (4.28 = 4.24 = 693C, 24.31 = 24.14 = 984CD, *Ad Past.* 78 = 1193D, *Ibid.* 90 = 1197C).

So far our discussion of martyrdom has been limited to a small number of important quotations. Balfour believed that the notion of martyrdom is not explicitly developed in the *Scala*. However, we would be hesitant to detach the notions of martyrdom and confession, which is 'not quite'<sup>2</sup> martyrdom, in the same way as he does. Neither notion is applied to inner life literally. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> Theodoret of Cyrhus. *A history of the monks of Syria*. Translated, with an introduction and notes, by R. M. Price. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1985 (CS 88). p. XXV.

<sup>2</sup> *Notions*. p. 24.



there are many more occasions where the notions of confession and martyrdom are implicit. Was not Acacius, killed by his mentor, a martyr (4.110 = 4.111 = 720B-721A)? Can the physical sufferings of the monks in prison be compared with those of the martyrs (5.19 = 5.5 = 772A)? It seems to us that a careful reading of the *Scala* reveals notions of martyrdom which are both explicit and implicit, and the notion of witnessing, which we shall look shortly is one of them.

### *Monasticism as angelic life*

Applying the language of angelic life to monasticism and to Christian life in general must have been so widely accepted by the time of Climacus that it stood in no need of interpretation. It is with some difficulty that it is possible to crystallise its meanings and overtones. According to Spidlik *et al*, the term 'angelic life' usually denotes the eschatological character of monastic (and generally Christian) life. As such, it has a variety of meanings and overtones. Spidlik *et al* distinguish the connotations of virginity, ἀπάθεια, contemplation, worship, and obedience being the chief ones<sup>1</sup>.

Climacus adopts this traditional ideal, defining monasticism as an 'angelic order and state achieved in an earthly and soiled body (1.4 = 1.10 = 633B, cf. 8.19 = 8.22 = 832C, 26.23 = 26.18 = 1020B). 'The monastery (κοινόβιον) is an earthly heaven. Therefore, let us dispose our heart to be like angels serving (λειτουργοῦντες) the Lord (4.87 = 4.82 = 713B). Likewise, one who is approaching perfection is 'a fellow worshipper with angels' (ἀγγέλων συλλειτουργός) (26.19 = 26.14 = 1017C). Purity is called 'a

<sup>1</sup> Spidlik T, Tenace M, Cemus R. *Questions monastiques en Orient*. Roma: Pontificio Istituto orientale, 1999. OCA 259. pp. 82-85. See Price. *Introduction*. pp. XXX-XXXI for 'angelic life' in Theodoret of Cyrus.

supernatural denial of nature, which means that a mortal and corruptible body is rivalling the celestial spirits in a truly marvellous way' (15.1 = 15.2 = 880D). The monks of the monastery Climacus had visited he describes as 'earth-dwellers imitating the heavenly beings'. By this, he means presumably the 'indissoluble bond of love' among them, but it is a general admiration of their way of life (4.13-14 = 4.16 = 684D – 685A). Their obedience and humility presented 'an awful and angelic sight' (4.20 = 4.18 = 688B). The link between angels and obedience occurs once again: 'And he obeyed as an angel obeys the Lord' (4.23 = 4.21 = 689B).

Thus, we can see that behind his use of 'angelic' Climacus articulates traditional connotations, such as virginity, worship and obedience. The notion of ἀπάθεια, which we have discussed earlier, is probably the most important one.

### ***Monks and those in the world***

How does Climacus see the relation of monks to those living the world? Apparently, he has a strong sense of the superiority of the monastic path: 'It is possible to walk, even when tied with the fetters of worldly affairs and iron cares, but only with difficulty. For even those who have iron chains on their feet can often walk; but they are continually stumbling and getting hurt. An unmarried man, who is only tied to the world by business affairs, is like one who has fetters on his hands; and therefore, when he wishes to the monastic life, he has nothing to hinder him. But the married man is like he who is bound hand and foot' (1.20 = 1.36-37 = 640B). Comparing the monks with those in the world, Climacus writes, 'For who amongst them has ever worked any miracles? Who has raised the dead? Who has driven out devils? No one. All these are the victorious rewards of monks, rewards which the world cannot receive; and if it could, then

what is the need of asceticism or solitude' (2.9 = 2.15 = 657B). Finally, 'Angels are a light for monks, and the monastic life is a light for all men. Therefore let monks strive to become a good example in everything, giving no occasion for stumbling in anything in their works and deeds. For if the light becomes darkness, how much darker will be that darkness, that is, those living in the world.' (26.31 = 26.23 = 1020D – 1021A).

How can this position be compared to earlier writings? If we look at Basil the Great, we do not find such a sharp opposition. Although he does believe in the superiority of the monastic path, he is not as categorical as Climacus. According to Basil, 'all men shall give account to God, both monks and married people. The only concession to the married man will be pardon for his lack of continence and his desire for and intercourse of a woman. But the rest of the commands have been laid down for all alike, and are fraught with danger for those who transgress them. For when Christ told in the Gospels the Father's commands, He was addressing men living in the world. When once it happened that He was asked a question and answered His disciples in private, He testified saying: "What I say unto you, I say unto all"<sup>1</sup>' (*Serm. De Renunt. Saec.* PG 31. 629A). The logic of Basil is simple: the spiritual life consists of nothing else but fulfilling the Gospel commandments, which are by definition the same for everyone. The only alternative to that would be to believe that these commandments could only be fulfilled through sexual continence – a logic rejected by the Church, although accepted by some of its members.

Besides Basil, there are some edifying stories in monastic literature aimed to teach that in the world one can reach greater spiritual progress than in

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<sup>1</sup> Mk. 13.37.

monastic life. The most famous account is that about Anthony and the tanner, who condemned to hell only himself and thus exceeded Anthony (*Verba Seniorum* III.130 PG 73 785CD, VII,XV,2 PG 1038BC). An interesting account may be found in the Syrian *Apophthegmata*. Abba Macarius was told that he has not yet arrived to the measure of certain two women in a city. When he finds them, they say: 'Believe us, O father; neither of us has ever been absent from, or kept herself from, her husband's couch up to this day; what work, then, would you see in us?' It turns out later that, having been prevented from entering a community of virgins, they lived so virtuously, that they could say: 'Up to this present moment we have lived in this house for twelve years, and we have never wanted to quarrel with each other, and neither of us has spoken one abominable word of her companion'. Having seen them, Macarius concludes: 'Verily, virginity by itself is nothing, nor marriage, nor life as a monk, nor life in the world; for God seeks the desire [of a man], and gives the Spirit to every man'. (Syr. II.4) As K.Ware points out, in this narrative (as well as in its Latin parallel) it is the word 'desire' that is crucial – it is the desire of the two women to become nuns that earned them sanctity<sup>1</sup>. On other occasions those living in the world excel monks in specifically monastic virtues and lifestyle. For example, the Alphabetic *Apophthegmata* describes how two monks received a revelation, similar to Macarius, to see a husband and a wife who exceeded them in virtue. A husband, who is a shepherd, admits: 'Here are these sheep; we received them from our parents, and if, by God's help we make a little profit, we divide it into three parts: one for the poor, the second for hospitality, and the third for our personal needs. Since I married my wife, we have not had intercourse with each

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<sup>1</sup> *The Monk and the Married Christian: Some Comparisons in Early Monastic Sources. Eastern Church Review*. 1974. vol. 6. p. 80.

other, for she is a virgin; we each live alone. At night we wear hair-shirts and our ordinary clothes by day. No-one has known of this till now' (*Apophth. Alph. Eucharistus the Secular*). Indeed, to a modern reader this may seem more like a monk and a nun living in the world, but, nevertheless, there is a clear message to the monastic readers<sup>1</sup>.

Having analysed the corpus of the early monastic (mainly *Apophthegmata*) tradition in search of those narratives, which were optimistic about the possibility of attaining sanctity in the world by a non-monastic path, K. Ware finds only two – the story of Anthony and the tanner being one of them<sup>2</sup>. However, it is most likely that even these two stories were intended to be a pedagogic reminder to the monks, rather than a consolation to the κοσμικοί. In *Historia Monachorum* God shows Paphnutius three people in the world, who equal him in virtue – a flute-player, a village head man and a pearl merchant. Paphnutius makes monks out of all three (XIV).

It is obvious that Climacus believes monastic life to be superior to the life in the world, although his picture of life in a monastic community is rather grim. He is quite certain about the mission of monasticism – that of 'spiritual lighthouse', providing a landmark to everyone else. Here we return to the original meaning of martyrdom – that of witnessing. It can be seen from Climacus' passages, quoted above, that this meaning of monasticism is present.

The *Scala* sums up almost four centuries of monastic tradition, by the time of Climacus the names of Anthony and Pachomius had become legendary. Monasticism was regarded in such way not only by itself, but by the laity – hence

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<sup>1</sup> See also *Apophthegmata. Alph.* Anthony 24, Silvanus 2, Sisoës 7.

<sup>2</sup> See *Monk*.

the great popularity of the *Scala* among both the monks and the laypeople, seeking spiritual direction among monks and monastic writings.

***‘Theory of the dawning sun’ or ‘quest for the golden age’?***

If we look carefully at the monastic writings we can see that they often contain a specific view of history of monasticism; the authors see ‘present generation’ (as in *Scala* 1.24 = 1.45 = 641C) as secondary in regards to earlier generations and they see their own times as those of decline. Such perception occurs so often that, reading the earliest monastic texts, one can only wonder if there was ever a period other than that of decadence and decay. This outlook was also characteristic of Climacus: ‘The present generation is seriously corrupt and all full of pride and hypocrisy. In bodily labours, it perhaps reaches the level of our ancient Fathers, but it is not graced with their gifts, though I think nature never had such need of spiritual gifts as now. And we have received our due’ (26.52 = 26.32 = 1024C). There is a constant nostalgia for the past: ‘We should constantly be examining and comparing ourselves with the holy Fathers and the lights who lived before us, and we should then find that we have not yet entered upon the path of ascetic life, and have not kept our vow in holy fashion, and in disposition are still living in the world’ (23.21 = 22.21 = 968D – 969A).

There is a recurring longing for the grace with which God endowed ‘the ancients’. An anonymous Abba lamented, that the days of οἱ παλαιοί are gone: ‘in those days there was charity and each one caused his neighbour to make progress, but now the charity has grown cold, each one pulls his neighbour back, and that is why we do not receive grace’ (*Apophth. Syst.* 349). Abba Elias ironically suggested choosing between the ways of life of ‘our predecessors’ and ‘among monks nowadays’ (*Apophth. Alph.* Elias 8), while Abba Poemen thought

there was no progress since the third generation of monks in Scetis (*Ibid.* Poemen 166 cf. *Ibid.* Elias 2.). In the *Historia Monachorum* Copres, who was known as a miracle-worker through healings and exorcisms said: 'There is nothing wonderful about my achievements ... when they are compared with the rule of life which our fathers followed' (X.1). Cassian complains that the anchorites eat two or three times as much as they used to (*Conl.* XIX.VI.2). The motif recurs in the *Pratum Spirituale*: 'In our fathers' time it was very important to avoid distractions. Now our cooking pot and our handwork rule us' (130 cf. 54, 162, 168, 180).

Ramsey suggests the possible roots for such an outlook in the Bible (Gen. 6.1ff, 1 Kgs. 11ff, Is. 1ff) and in Plato (*Resp.* 8.1ff). However, it is doubtful that the Abbas of *Apophthegmata* and *Pratum* were inspired by the *Respublica*. The biblical outlook is a more probable source. Why does this pessimism should flourish, above all, in monasticism? Is it a rhetorical and educative device, or is the belief in its own degradation an essential feature of Eastern monasticism? It seems to us that the answer is simpler: unless monks are humble in evaluating the results of their labour, their toil is vain.

### ***Climacus and the monastic ideal***

Climacus distinguishes between three monastic paths, or 'three specific kinds of establishment': 'the retirement and solitude of a spiritual athlete, or living in stillness with one or two others, or settling patiently in a community. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left<sup>1</sup>, but follow the King's highway<sup>2</sup>'. Of the three ways of life mentioned above, the second is suitable for many people;

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 4.28.

<sup>2</sup> Num. 20.17.

for it is said: 'Woe to him who is alone when he falls into despondence or lethargy or laziness or despair, 'and has no one among men to lift him up.'<sup>1</sup> 'For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them', said the Lord.'<sup>2</sup> (1.26 = 1.47 = 641D - 644A). As on other occasions, the principle of *διάκρισις* needs to be used. John the Sabbaite, faced with the necessity to give advice to three young monks, suggested to one of them to withdraw into *ἡσυχία* in subjection to a father, another to join a community and the third to find the most strict and exacting guide, 'and with daily perseverance drink abuse and scorn as milk and honey' (4.112 = 4.113 = 721D - 724B). Climacus himself suggests different paths to different people, depending on their particular qualities. To some people Climacus recommended 'sometimes to live in one way, sometimes in the other way of life, but that they should be entirely subject to a superior' (8.18 = 8.20 = 832B). The threefold scheme is reflected in Climacus' view of prayer: 'It is possible for all to pray with a congregation; for many it is possible to pray with a single kindred spirit; solitary prayer is for the very few.' (19.5 = 18.5 = 937CD). However, 'psalmody in a crowded congregation is accompanied by captivity and wondering of the thoughts; but in solitude, this does not happen' (28.32 = 28.37 = 1136B).

Thus, Climacus clearly prefers the middle stage to the other two. Why? The answer is simple: both community and solitary life are associated with a number of temptations, which the middle way may help to avoid.

'Community life is not for all, on account of covetousness; and places of solitude are not for all, on account of anger. But each will consider what is most suited for his needs' (1.25 = 1.46 = 641CD). The other specific temptations of

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<sup>1</sup> Eccl. 4.10.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 18.20.



the community life are greed of stomach, irritability (4.117 = 4.118 = 725B). The danger of homosexuality is implied (15.46 = 15.42 = 889A, 26.149 = 26.2.33 = 1065C). However, community life is opposed to ἀκηδία (13.4 = 13.3 = 860A, 28.32 = 28.37 = 1136B), which is called ‘a constant companion of a hermit’ (13.4 = 13.3 = 860A, cf. 28.32 = 28.37 = 1136B) and to cowardice (21.1 = 20.1 = 945B). Those who live in ‘ascetical places bereft of consolation’ may be tempted by ingratitude (26.20 = 26.15 = 1017D) and may give credit to themselves for their achievements (4.56 = 4.49 = 708A). It is interesting, however, that a hermit is not less liable to sexual temptations than those living in community. Here Climacus demonstrates particular insight: ‘The devil has a particular habit, especially in warring against the ascetics and those leading the solitary life, of using all his force, all his zeal, all his cunning, all his intrigue, all his ingenuity and purpose, to assail them by means of what is unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν), and not by what is natural (κατὰ φύσιν). Therefore, ascetics coming into contact with women, and not in any way tempted either by desire or thought, have sometimes regarded themselves as already blessed, not knowing, poor things, that where a worse downfall had been prepared for them, there was no need of the lesser one (15.29 = 15.26 = 885B).

Remembrance of wrongs is particularly dangerous: ‘An ἡσυχαστής who remembers wrongs is an adder hidden in a hole, which carries about within itself deadly poison’ (9.13 = 9.12 = 841D). To illustrate the point, Climacus presents a picture of anchorites, who were ‘fighting by themselves in their cells like caged partridges from bitterness and anger, and leaping in the face of their offender as if he were actually present’. Climacus suggested that they should not to stay in

solitude, so as not to 'be changed from human beings to demons' (8.18 = 8.20 = 832A).

Jerome distinguishes three kinds of monks: the coenobites, the solitaries and the *remnuoth*, who 'dwell together by twos or threes, not many more, and live according to their own will and independently'. Jerome is far from thinking that this is the 'royal way': as he informs, they overprice their products, compete with each other in fasting, 'they sigh a great deal, pay visits to virgins, belittle the clergy, and, whenever a feast day comes round, eat themselves sick.' (*Ep.* 22.34-36). Cassian also distinguishes three kinds of monks: coenobites, anchorites and sarabaites, the latter being severely criticized (*Conl.* XVIII). When we attempt to grasp the monastic ideal in Cassian, we are faced with an apparent inconsistency as to what path of monastic life he believes to be the best. Cassian wrote about the *Institutes*: 'these books, which we are now arranging with the Lord's help to write, are mainly taken up with what belongs to the outer man and the customs of the Coenobia, yet those (i.e. *Conferences*) will rather be concerned with the training of the inner man and the perfection of the heart, and the life and doctrine of the Anchorites' (*Inst.* 2.9). In the *Conferences*' first preface Cassian states that 'the solitary life is greater and more sublime than the cenobia'. Later on he shows Paphnutius progressing from coenobium to solitude: 'From his youth he gave himself over with such zeal to the training of the cenobia that in the short time he lived in them he was equally enriched with both the good of submission and the knowledge of all virtues ... Having gone to higher things and burning with zeal, he strove to penetrate the remote parts of the desert. Thus, no longer held back by any human companionship, he would more easily be united with the Lord to whom, while surrounded by a large number of brothers, he longed to be

inseparably joined' (*Conl.* III.I.2). As Ramsey points out, the four monks said to combine coenobitic and solitary virtues (*Ibid.* XIX.IX.1-2) are themselves anchorites<sup>1</sup>. Cassian links seeking solitude with 'a desire for higher progress and divine contemplation' (*Conl.* XVIII.VI.1), later on referring to the coenobium as 'the first training ground' before the solitary life (*Ibid.* XVIII.XVI.15). However, in the same chapter he refers to coenobitism as 'the first not only in time but also in grace' (*Conl.* XVIII.V.4). Again, in *Conl.* XVIII.XI.1 coenobites are called 'the best kind of monks'. Likewise, in *Inst.* 5.36. Cassian describes coenobites as 'the best order of monks, which is also the first', proceeding to say that the anchorites are 'considered more excellent'. The suggestion of De Vogüé that the history of coenobitic and anchoritic institutions parallels the history of the individual monk, who must pass through a coenobium before attempting solitude<sup>2</sup>, Ramsey dismisses as speculative, himself suggesting that 'there was a direct link between the apostolic community and coenobitism, which he (Cassian) did not feel free to ignore even though he might have wished that it were otherwise'<sup>3</sup>, thus qualifying Cassian's understanding of coenobitism as 'elitist'<sup>4</sup>.

P. Rousseau has a different way of solving the problem. He suggests an evolution in Cassian's thought. He believes that 'In the early stages, he appears to have had in mind two distinct groups of people, pursuing their ideals side by side. Subsequently, he suggested that the two modes of life might be more accurately considered as possible stages in the lives of the individuals. Finally, he

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<sup>1</sup> John Cassian: *The Conferences*. Translated and annotated by Boniface Ramsey. New York : Paulist Press, 1997 (ACW 57). p. 665.

<sup>2</sup> *Monachisme et Eglise dans la pensée de Cassien*. In: *Théologie de la Vie Monastique: Etudes sur la Tradition Patristique*. Aubier, 1961. p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> *Conferences*. p. 632.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 630.

surrendered to the historical development of asceticism, and agreed that the solitary life might not be practical, nor even desirable, in spite of its theoretical excellence'<sup>1</sup>. Is this a fair evaluation?

When we look at Cassian's earlier writings, which Rousseau believes to describe coenobites and anchorites living 'side by side', it is not at all apparent that these are not sequential. For example, in the *Institutes*, which belongs to Cassian's earlier period, he describes how he was 'contemplating a large number of monks bound by the discipline of the Coenobium, and trained in that excellent system of monasteries, which is also the earliest, we were also eager to see another as well which is better, viz.: that of the anchorites, as we were incited thereto by the praises of it by everybody. For these men, having first lived for a very long time in Coenobia, and having diligently learnt all the rules of patience and discretion, and acquired the virtues of humility and renunciation, and having perfectly overcome all their faults, in order to engage in most fearful conflict with the devils, penetrate the deepest recesses of the desert' (*Inst.* V.36). Secondly, and most importantly, we do not find any 'contrast between praise for the solitary life and grudging admission that the coenobitic vocation will claim the attention of most'<sup>2</sup>. What we do see is an outlook similar to Basil and to Climacus. It may be summarized as follows. Solitary life is superior to coenobitic in a sense that it implies a greater progress in the spiritual life and a greater degree of communion with God. It also has characteristic dangers, particularly for those who have not approached perfection and have inadequate motivation for the solitary life. Therefore, coenobitic life is superior in the sense that it is

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<sup>1</sup> *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.181

suitable for a vast majority of people. In fact, the only grudge of Cassian is that many embrace the solitary life 'out of an immature desire' (*Conl.* XIX.X.1) and that the desert has become so over-populated that solitary life is no longer solitary (*Ibid.* XIX.V.2).

### ***From coenobium to solitude***

Does Climacus think that life in a community is characteristic of the earlier stages of one's spiritual life, and life in solitude is characteristic of the later stages? D. Chitty shows that in 4<sup>th</sup> century Egypt after a period of coenobitic training monks would pass to the anchoritic life in the cells<sup>1</sup>. Basil is aware of such a practice (*Reg. Fus. Tract.* 7, *Reg. Brev. Tract.* 74), and Cassian takes it for granted, as we saw.

To some monks Climacus advised the solitary life not because of their progress, but because they were 'fawners, affectionate towards the brethren and lovers of beautiful faces' (8.18 = 8.20 = 832AB). In all other instances it is obvious that the solitary life needs to be preceded by life in the community. 'Monastic community such as is pleasing to God is like the laundry in which uncleanness, grossness and deformity of soul are scoured out; and the dye-works will be the solitary life for those who have laid aside lust, remembrance of wrongs, and anger, and who are now passing from the monastery to solitude (ἡσυχία)' (26.170 = 26-2.51 = 1072AB). This is done in order to advance in the spiritual life, and insufficient spiritual integrity is an obstacle in embarking on an anchoritic path. This concept recurs in the *Scala* a number of times, mainly in the chapter on obedience: 'I have seen some living in obedience who, through their father's direction, became filled with compunction, meek, temperate, zealous,

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<sup>1</sup> *Desert.* p. 32.

free from inner conflicts and fervent. But demons came to them and sowed in them a thought that they now had the qualifications for the solitary life, and that in stillness, they would attain to freedom from passion as the final prize. Thus deceived, they left the harbour and put out to sea, but when a storm came down upon them they were pitifully exposed to danger from this foul and briny ocean, through being unprovided with pilots' (4.59 = 4.52 = 708BC, cf. 4.69 = 4.62 = 709C).. 'It is dangerous for an inexperienced soldier to leave his regiment and engage in single combat. And it is not without peril for a monk to attempt the solitary life before he has had much experience and practice in the struggle with the animal passions' (4.73 = 4.68 = 712A). 'Only a few (and this is true what I say) can live in ἡσυχία; in fact, only those who have obtained divine consolation for encouragement in their labours and divine cooperation in their struggles' (4.119 = 4.121 = 725C).

Thus it is clear that solitude requires preparation in subjection to a spiritual guide, and Climacus' numerous references to this pattern indicate that it was well established. However, while life in a coenobium may serve as a preparation for solitude, there are exceptions to the rule: towards the end of the book, he writes: 'Do not clamour at what I am going to say. There are indeed true and upright souls, though they are rare, who are strangers to guile, hypocrisy and mischief, for whom living with men is completely uncongenial. But with the help of their guide, from ἡσυχία as from a harbour, they can ascend to Heaven without desiring or experiencing the disturbances and stumbling-blocks of community life.' (26.179 = 26-2.61 = 1073B).

We have until now spoken about progressing from coenobium to solitude. Is it possible to return to obedience from ἡσυχία? Climacus accepts such a

possibility, and this change could be to the advantage of a monk (4.125 = 4.132 = 728B). ‘Those who have leapt out of obedience will tell you of its value, for only then they fully realized the heaven in which they had been living’ (4.123 = 4.129 = 728AB), he adds. Although Climacus may be referring to some examples he knew, it may possibly be an allusion to Abba John from Cassian’s *Conferences*, who describes his return to coenobium in detail. Explaining the reasons behind his decision, Abba John lists overpopulation of the desert, concern for manual work and food supplies, attending to the needs of visitors, the danger of arrogance which comes from human praise, and, finally, a general decline of fervour among inhabitants of the desert. (*Conl.* XIX.V.1-VI.5). Cassian emphasises that Abba John not only returned to the community, but became ‘subject to an abba until death’, and it is through this act that John saw himself imitating the humility and obedience of Christ’ (*Ibid.* XIX.V.6). Another interesting piece of evidence comes from Barsanuphius of Gaza. A certain monk addressed him, lamenting that he had not had sufficient spiritual strength to withdraw into ἡσυχία, and was pondering whether he should return to the coenobium. Barsanuphius was quite categorical: ‘As you have decided to stay in your cell in solitude, if you return to the coenobium, you will become vainglorious; and maybe you will not remain strong enough in your mind, that is, to remain in the coenobium and will finally leave it, and it will be a double evil’ (*Corr.* 185).

There are no reasons to believe that a return from solitude into community was something ordinary in early monasticism. Cassian himself presents this decision as something extraordinary. Moreover, the chapter of the *Scala* from which the passages above are quoted, teaches the value of obedience to those

under it, while in his discourse on ἡσυχία Climacus does not suggest that anchorites abandon solitude.

### *The meaning of the community life*

Life in a community has advantages of its own. Mutual zeal in a community incites prayer (28.32 = 28.37 = 1136B). 'There are indolent souls living in monasteries, and by indulging in what nourishes their indolence they come to complete ruin. But there are also souls who, through living with others, strip themselves of their indolence' (27.34 = 27.2.4 = 1105D – 1108A). Living with others helps to prevent an illusory view of one's well-being. 'A horse when alone often imagines that it is galloping, but when it is with others it finds out how slow it is' (25.21 = 25.20 = 993B). The image appears later once again: 'As galloping horses race one another, so a good community excites mutual fervour' (26.s22 = 26-3.13 = 1085C). However, the coenobium, which is an 'earthly heaven', also has dangers and temptations of its own. Dependence of one's progress upon the people around may be both positive and negative. The difficulties of living in a community result either in salvation, or in perdition. Salvation becomes dependent upon others. 'I have seen innocent and most beautiful children come to school for the sake of wisdom, education and profit, but through contact with the other pupils they learnt there nothing but cunning and vice. The intelligent will understand this.' (4.114 = 4.115 = 724CD) Climacus writes: 'Those living in stillness subject to a father have only demons working against them. But those living in a community struggle with demons and human beings. The former, being always under the eyes of the master, keep his commandments more strictly; but the latter, on account of his absence, break them to some extent. However, those who are zealous and industrious more than



make up for this failing by enduring collisions and knocks, and win double crowns. Let us keep guard over ourselves with all care. For when a harbour is full of ships, it is easy for them to get crushed by each other, especially if they are secretly riddled with bad temper as by some worm' (4.76-77 = 4.72-73 = 712C). However, the dangers associated with living in a community may be to one's advantage on condition of his inner efforts. An older monk advises to Climacus: 'Fix your mind to your soul as to the wood of the cross, to be struck like an anvil with blow upon blow of the hammers, to be mocked, abused, ridiculed and wronged' (4.36 = 4.31 = 700C) An example of such behaviour is Abbacyrus, who, according to Climacus' narrative, was greatly maltreated by the brethren and driven out of the refectory almost every day for the reason of being too talkative. Through enduring temptations from his brethren he was freed from demonic temptations (4.29-30 = 4.25 = 693C-696A). The notion recurs in the *Scala* again and again. 'If anyone has noticed that he is easily overcome by conceit and sharp temper, guile and hypocrisy, and has thought of defending himself against them by drawing the two-edged sword of meekness and patience, then, if he wishes to be completely freed from these vices, he should go and live in a monastic community as in a fuller's shop of salvation. He should especially choose the most austere. Then he will be spiritually stretched and beaten by the insults and dishonours of his tempestuous brethren, and perhaps even sometimes physically thrashed, trampled and kicked, and so he may wash out the filth which is still in the sentient part of his soul' (8.25 = 8.28 = 833AB, cf. 26.170 = 26-2.51 = 1072B). John the Sabbaite, describes how he, being the only foreign monk in a monastery, was regarded by all with contempt, insulted and forced to do all the heavy work. Having patiently endured all this, he was forgiven his sins (4.111 =

4.112 = 721AD). Thus, one is purified in the community as gold in the furnace (4.29 = 4.25 = 696A, 4.126 = 4.133 = 728B) an image, used in the same context by Evagrius (*Ad Eulog.* 31) and Barsanuphius of Gaza (*Corr.* 21). Climacus' *Life* says that he himself spent forty years in solitude, and joined the coenobitic life only as an abbot. However, in his advice Climacus may be influenced not as much by his own experience, but by the experience of the other solitaires.

All those passages deserve to be quoted because they the embody the specific vision and theology of monastic life which Climacus had. How does it compare with earlier concepts?

It was always understood that salvation cannot be achieved in isolation from neighbour. 'Abba John the Dwarf said, 'A house is not built by beginning at the top and working down. You must begin with the foundations in order to reach the top.' They said to him, 'What does this saying mean? He said, 'The foundation is our neighbour, whom we must win, and that is the place to begin. For all the commandments of Christ depend on this one' (*Apophthegmata. Alph.* John the Dwarf 39). Ultimately the principle was expressed by the great Anthony: 'Our life and death is with our neighbour. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalise our brother, we have sinned against Christ' (*Ibid.* Anthony 9).

What was the theology behind Pachomius' *koinonia*? 'I will show you as well that the honour and the glory of men of the Koinonia, who have a good way of life together with the excellence of the toils they impose on themselves, are superior to those of men who lead the anchoritic life ... he who makes progress in the Koinonia with purity, obedience, humility and submissiveness, and puts no stumbling-block or scandal before anyone by his works or by his acts, that one

will grow rich forever in imperishable and enduring riches. But should he be negligent, and should a soul be scandalized by him and perished by from it, woe to that man; not only has he lost his soul and the troubles he took on himself, but also he will have to render an account to God for that soul he scandalized ... So it is with an ascetic leading the anchoritic life. He does not bear the responsibility for other ascetics, but neither does he see those who practice exercises – a thing which would incite him to imitate their actions and the excellent practices they perform in order to do the same himself. Well, such a man will not rank high in the kingdom of heaven, but neither will he be deprived of eternal life (*SBo.* 105). Even if these words do not belong to Pachomius itself, they certainly reflect the spirit of the community.

According to Basil, solitary life deprives one of the possibility of fulfilling the commandment of Christ to love and serve one another<sup>1</sup>. ‘Who does not know that man is a tame and sociable animal (ἡμέρον καὶ κοινωνικὸν ζῶον), and not a solitary (μοναστικόν) and fierce one? For nothing is so characteristic of our nature as to associate with one another, to need one another, and to love our kind’ (*Reg. Fus. Tract.* 3). Further on Basil develops this idea. He enumerates a few reasons, which justify the community life. Firstly, no man is self-sufficient (αὐτάρκης) or in his material necessities, but also in his spiritual needs. One cannot be saved by himself. ‘God the Creator ordained that we need one another, as it is written<sup>2</sup>, in order that we may be linked with one another. For “love” we read “seeks not its own.”<sup>3</sup> Now the solitary life has one aim, the service of the needs of the individual. But this is in conflict with the law of love, which

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 3.34,35, Mt 35.35, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 12.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 3.5.

the apostle fulfilled when he sought not his own advantage but that of the many, that they might be saved.' Moreover, in solitude one may have a wrong view of his spiritual state, not being able to be reproved by the other. The works of charity are abandoned. Solitude puts under question the principle of the Church, which consists in sharing each other's gifts. Communal approval or disapproval may be a strong incentive to spiritual progress. Humility or compassion may not be known in solitude (*Reg. Fus. Tract. 7*). In *Ep. 295* Basil repeats that the reward of each member of the community depends both on his own progress and that of his brother. In order to understand Basil, we must appreciate that he is attempting to safeguard the unity of the Church. It was vital to find the correlation between monasticism and the entire Church, hence the emphasis on the image of the body of Christ from 1 Cor 12.12-27 and Rom 12.4-5.

Not that Basil was against solitude as such. In a letter to Gregory of Nazianzus he wrote: 'Solitude (ἐρημία) gives us the greatest help, since it calms our passions, and gives reason leisure to sever them completely from the soul. For just as animals are easily subdued by caresses; so desire, anger, fear and grief, the venomous evils which beset the soul, if they are lulled to sleep by solitude (διὰ τῆς ἡσυχίας) and are not exasperated by constant irritations, are more easily subdued by the influence of reason' (*Ep. 2*). *Ep. 42* is entirely an encouragement to one embarking on a life of solitude. It seems that Basil simply believes that 'many perhaps have had the temerity to enter upon the solitary life (τοῦ μονήρους βίου), but few, I am inclined to think, have so discharged it worthily to the end' (*Ep. 42*). Thus, the definition of Basil as 'enemy of hermits'<sup>1</sup> is probably an overstatement. To a widow Basil wrote: 'if you possess the

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<sup>1</sup> A. Holmes. *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil*. London: DLT, 2000. p. 146.

consolation of the divine Scriptures, you will need neither us nor anyone else to help you see your duty, for sufficient is the counsel and the guidance to what is expedient which you receive from the Holy Spirit' (*Ep.* 283). It is interesting that what Basil uses above in *Reg. Fus. Tract.* 7 as an argument for community life, may at the same time be a demonic temptation to someone in solitude: to give up 'estrangement from brethren', who 'by the mere sight of their faces confer great benefit upon those who they meet' (*Ep.* 42). On the whole Basil does not reject the possibility of withdrawal to solitude – he is simply concerned that it needs to be approved by authorities and not be spontaneous.

It is noteworthy that Basil (*Reg. Fus. Tract.* 7), Pachomius (*SI*) and Cassian (*Conl.* XVIII.V.1) cite Acts 4.32. Community life is first of all 'an imitation of the apostolic manner of living' (μίμημα τῆς ἀποστολικῆς πολιτείας) (*Basil Ep.* 295), which is its *raison d'être*. Climacus knows how far life in a community may be from the apostolic ideal. This leads him to seek a different theological justification for coenobium: he explores how this discordance between the way community life is, and the way it should be may be used to enhance the spiritual progress of the individual.

Another interesting issue is the possibility of mutual correction in community. Climacus warns monks not to appear more righteous than their brethren in any circumstances (4.81 = 4.75 = 712D – 713A). However, one should correct a brother in the cases of slander (10.4 = 10.3 = 845CD, 10.7 = 10.7 = 848A) and lying, 'for perhaps it is better to be sprinkled with a few drops of vainglory, if only you can become a channel of profit for many' (12.5 = 12.4 = 856AB). Climacus accepts the mutual correction by tempered instruction and patient reprimand, though not by rude speech and rough gestures, certainly not

by blows (8.19-20 = 8.22-23 = 832C, cf. 26.132 = 26-2.16 = 1061D). The monks in a monastery Climacus had visited employed a system of 'secret signs and gestures' (4.17 = 4.18 = 685C) to remind each other of prayer and in the absence of the superior corrected each other's behaviour by nods (4.15 = 4.16 = 685B).

Thus, we can see that Climacus, although insisting on being accurate and gentle in mutual correction, accepts its necessity. H. Dörries distinguishes two attitudes in this respect: while Basil the Great accepts mutual correction and finds it advantageous, the tradition of the *Apophthegmata* rejects it altogether<sup>1</sup>. Basil employs seven scriptural quotations to prove that those who remain silent 'are in danger, I say, of all the same destruction, or even worse, as he that sets at nought the Lord, and commits the same sin as one who has already sinned and been condemned, is worse than he who set at nought the law of Moses' (*Reg. Brev. Tract.* 47). *Apophthegmata* expresses a principle, which is probably expressed in a short saying 'To instruct your neighbour is the same thing as reproving him' (*Alph. Poemen* 157). The same Abba Poemen said that if he saw someone committing a sin, he would pass by without reprimanding him (*Ibid.* Poemen 113). One of the most colourful illustrations is one of the more famous ones: 'Some old men came to see Abba Poemen and said to him, 'When we see brothers who are dozing at the synaxis, shall we rouse them so that they will be watchful? He said to them, 'For my part when I see a brother who is dozing, I put his head on my knees and let him rest' (*Ibid.* Poemen 92).

Perhaps Dörries takes the matter too far by opposing the 'institutional' approach of Basil to the 'charismatic' approach of the Desert. He believed that 'In their protest against the traditional order the desert fathers were determined

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<sup>1</sup> *The Place of Confession in Ancient Monasticism*. In: SP 5 (TU 80; Berlin 1962). p. 293-298.

by their view concerning the depths of the guilt which cannot be expiated by penitential achievements, and that the path toward men does not go by way of discipline and coercion, that true community is brought about only by means of words and love'<sup>1</sup>. We do not see any signs of protest in the *Apophthegmata*. In fact, the word 'discipline' is probably the key one here. The context of the *Apophthegmata* was not organized community, and the concept of discipline simply was not relevant in the same way as in the communities which Basil addresses. Barsanuphius of Gaza gives a detailed instruction on how a monk ought to correct another monk. If he is sensible, his sin ought to be pointed at, and if he is not, he could be warned: 'Believe me, you are worth being punished for your negligence, and the Abba will punish you as soon as I will tell him'. A reproof certainly ought to be made without agitation, but in calm spirits (*Corr.* 332-333).

### ***The meaning of the solitary life***

If we want to appreciate the theology behind Climacus' understanding of solitary life and its purposes, it is the concept of ἡσυχία that we need to examine, because for Climacus it signifies, in Völker's expression, 'the summit of monastic being'<sup>2</sup>.

In Classical Greek the term has a number of meanings, varying from 'silence' to 'solitude'<sup>3</sup>. This flexibility has been retained in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, where the term and its derivatives signify peace, tranquillity

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<sup>1</sup> *Confession*. pp. 297-298.

<sup>2</sup> *Scala*. p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. p. 779, Adnès. *Hésychasme*. cols. 382-383, I. Hausherr. *Hésychasme et prière*. Roma : Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1966. pp. 163-164.

and calm<sup>1</sup>, as well as in the patristic tradition, where it has a double connotation of silence and solitude<sup>2</sup>. Thus, both Hausherr and Adnès in their analysis of the term in Patristic tradition distinguish between exterior and interior ἡσυχία<sup>3</sup>. Sometimes the Fathers themselves introduce this distinction. For example, Mark the Monk makes a distinction between the ἡσυχία of body and ἡσυχία of νοῦς (*Justif.* 29, cf. *Leg.* 180). We shall be mainly preoccupied with the second meaning of the word, that is, of ἡσυχία as a state of the soul, besides being a mode of life, in Adnès' expression<sup>4</sup>. Climacus was the first writer to present it as a distinct concept, dedicating to it a separate chapter. Therefore, we need to trace the evolution of the term in earlier monastic writings in order to see how it came to signify a distinct spiritual reality.

Before Climacus most authors used the term simply as a synonym of solitary life or to denote refraining from speech. On some occasions it is not clear whether it is inner or outer ἡσυχία that is meant, in which cases, perhaps, there was no clear division between the two. Solitary life in the desert itself suggested greater spiritual progress. For example, a monk who was particularly devoted to ἡσυχία, is said to be spending his days 'in prayer and hymnody and much contemplation, he saw clear visions of a divine nature, sometimes when fully awake, and sometimes while asleep' (*Historia Monachorum* I.45). Later on, ἡσυχία is mentioned in connection with 'ceaseless contemplation' (I.62). In other authors it is clearer that ἡσυχία is described as an inner state. For example, in Theodoretus' *Historia Religiosa*, τῆς ψυχῆς ἡσυχία is explicitly named a

<sup>1</sup> *Vollständige Konkordanz zum Griechischen Neuen Testament*. Ed. K. Aland. Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter. Band I-II. 1983. Band I. p. 507, Adnès. *Hésychasme*. col. 383-384, Hausherr. *Hésychasme*. pp. 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> Lampe. *Lexicon*. p.609.

<sup>3</sup> Adnès. *Hésychasme*, Hausherr. *Hésychasme* pp. 166-169.

<sup>4</sup> *Hésychasme*. col. 389.



‘supreme delight’ (II.13), while for Diadochus the ‘καὶρὸς τῆς ἡσυχίας’ is identified with the higher degree of contemplation and prayer (*Cap. Gnost.* 68). Macarius of Egypt describes a soul in a state of ‘great quietness (ἐν πολλῇ τινι ἡσυχίᾳ) and calm and peace, with no sense of anything else but spiritual pleasure, and repose unspeakable and well-being’ (*Coll. H* 18.9 = *Coll. B* 13.2.3). He twice uses the term ‘νοερὰ ἡσυχία’ in conjunction with prayer (*Coll. B* 38.2.10, 41.1.2) and speaks about mind ‘seating on the throne of ἡσυχία and gazing towards God’ (*Coll. B* 62.1.3).

Although the word does not occur often in Evagrius, in a treatise *Rerum Monachalium Rationes*, which occupies only 8 columns in Migne’s edition, the word ἡσυχία and its derivatives occur 18 times. Although Evagrius does not define ἡσυχία, he expands its meaning to embrace the inner life. ‘Make ἡσυχία your criterion for testing the value of anything, and choose always what contributes to it’, he writes (*Rer. Mon. Rat.* 6): ‘Do you desire, then, to embrace this life of solitude (τὸν μονήρη βίον), and to seek out the blessings of stillness (τῆς ἡσυχίας ... τρόπαια)? If so, abandon the cares of the world, and the principalities and powers that lie behind them; free yourself from attachment to material things from domination by passions and desires, so that as a stranger to all this you may attain true stillness’ (*Ibid.* 3). Thus, true ἡσυχία implies the alienation from worldly thoughts, cares and passions. Here Evagrius makes a link between ἡσυχία and ἀμεριμνία, which is traditional: many writers use the words in conjunction with each other<sup>1</sup>. We shall see that this link will also be made by Climacus.

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<sup>1</sup> Adnès. *Hesychasme*. col. 390.

However, there is an interesting difference between the two writers. In the chapter on ἡσυχία Climacus instructs: 'It is difficult to overcome the midday nap, especially in the summer time; then, and perhaps only then, is manual work possible' (27.48). Climacus' hesitancy with regard to manual work is different from the position of Evagrius, who writes in the above-mentioned treatise: 'Provide yourself with such work for your hands as can be done, if possible, both during the day and the night, so that you are not a burden to anyone, and indeed can give to others, as Paul the Apostle advises' (cf. 1 Thess. 2.9, Eph.4.28) (*Rer. Mon Rat.* 8). We have already discussed the relationship between prayer and labour in monastic authors. Here it would be sufficient to state that Climacus, unlike Evagrius and some other earlier authors, does not see manual labour as an essential part of the solitary's timetable.

When we turn to the *Apophthegmata*, we see that ἡσυχία, in all its connotations, is one of the most frequently recurring motifs. Again, it is sometimes it is used as a synonym for ἐρημία (e.g. *Alph.* Anthony 11, Macarius the Great 22), but there is more to it. The precise meaning of ἡσυχία, as in other early writings, remains undefined. G. Gould believes that ἡσυχία 'could simply be a label for practices on which much stress was laid, namely living properly in the cell, and avoiding the effects of bad relationships with others'<sup>1</sup>. However, there are a few passages which help us to clarify the meaning in a way that is more specific. The following passage illustrates the inner concentration and attentiveness, associates with ἡσυχία: 'One day Abba Arsenius came to a place where there were reeds blowing in the wind. The old man said to the brothers, 'What is this movement?' They said, 'Some reeds.' Then old man said to them,

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<sup>1</sup> Gould. *Fathers*. p. 172. n. 27.

‘When one who is ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ hears the song of a little sparrow, his heart no longer experiences the same peace. How much worse it is when you hear the movements of those reeds’ (*Alph. Arsenius* 25). Thus, it is possible to speak about the ἡσυχία of νοῦς (*Alph. John the Dwarf* 25). On one occasion a definition of ἡσυχία is given: ‘A brother asked Abba Rufus, ‘What is ἡσυχία, and what use is it?’ The old man said, “Ἡσυχία means to remain sitting in one’s cell with fear and knowledge of God, holding far off the remembrance of wrongs suffered and pride of spirit. Such ... brings forth all the virtues, preserves the monk from the burning darts of the enemy, and does not allow him to be wounded by them. Yes, brother, acquire it. Keep in mind your future death, remembering that you do not know at what hour the thief will come. Likewise be watchful (νήφῃ) over your διάνοια’. (*Alph. Rufus* 1). Besides presenting us with an all-encompassing definition, this passage introduces the notion of νηψις in connection with ἡσυχία. It also describes ἡσυχία as the state in which a monk is less vulnerable to demonic attacks. As we shall see, both of these notions will appear in the *Scala*.

In Barsanuphius of Gaza the attainment of ἡσυχία corresponds to *theosis*: ‘The interior activity with pain of heart produces true ἡσυχία; and this ἡσυχία produces humility, which makes a man the dwelling place of God ... and man becomes the temple of God, sanctified, illumined, purified, enriched by grace, full good odour, of tenderness and exultation; he becomes god-bearing, and, even more, he becomes god, according to the word: “I said: you are gods and the sons of the most High (Ps 81;6)”’ (*Corr.* 119)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> see also Anthony 7, Theodora 6, John of the Thebaid 1, Macarius the Great 11, 35, Syncletica 26, Or 9 etc, Dorotheos *On Humility*.

In a number of instances by ἡσυχία Climacus means simply a solitary way of life, opposed to life in συνοδία (4.76 = 4.72 = 712C) or in κοινόβιον (27.34-35 = 27-2.4 = 1105D-1108A).

However, in other instances the term denotes inner reality. Climacus does not give an exhaustive definition of ἡσυχία as an inward state. The term escapes definition, and Climacus prefers to use various definitions to describe its various facets. The variety of connotations may be summarized as a state of tranquillity, characterized by inviolability to temptations. It is also closely associated with ἀμεριμνία and νῆψις. This is not a new-age tranquillity for the sake of itself, but, rather, inner peace, which is attained after a period of long struggle. Most importantly, ἡσυχία is inseparable from prayer. In the words of P. Adnès, ἡσυχία 'is at the same time the climate and the emanation of prayer. It does not exist for anything but prayer, it does not come to be by anything other than prayer'<sup>1</sup>. This is why in the chapter on ἡσυχία Climacus brings in the central themes, which he develops in the chapter on prayer, as well as on other occasions when he discusses prayer. These are rapture (ἄρπαγή) (27.37 = 27-2.6 = 1108A and 27.26 = 27.23 = 1100C, where Climacus recalls Paul, who was 'caught up into Paradise, as into ἡσυχία (2 Cor 12.4), unceasing prayer (one of Climacus' definitions of ἡσυχία is that of 'unceasing worship and waiting upon God' (27.60 = 27-2.25 = 1112C)), of μονολόγιστος Jesus prayer ('let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of ἡσυχία' (27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C) and pure prayer. Climacus' definition of ἡσυχία as 'banishment of thoughts (ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων), and the rejection of even laudable cares' (27.51 = 27-2.17 = 1112A) is recalls his own

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<sup>1</sup> *Hesychasme*. col. 394.

definition of prayer as 'estrangement from the world, visible and invisible' in 28.25 = 28.28 = 1133C). Moreover, not only is it similar to his own definition of prayer but it is identical to the classical definition of Evagrius: 'προσευχὴ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων' (*De Or.* 70). Using this definition, Climacus intentionally draws ἡσυχία into the inner realm of prayer.

Climacus leaves his definition of ἡσυχία as 'unceasing worship and waiting upon God' (27.60 = 27-2.25 = 1112C) undeciphered. We find this concept more expanded in Cassian. According to C. Stewart, Cassian uses *tranquillitas*, the Latin equivalent of ἡσυχία, about twenty times<sup>1</sup>, usually speaking about either *tranquillitas mentis* or *tranquillitas cordis*. He often expresses the same ideas as Climacus, but articulates them better. This is how, for example, he ties together the notions of *tranquillitas mentis* and prayer: 'When the mind has been established in tranquillity and has been freed from the bonds of every fleshly passion, and the heart's attention is unwaveringly fastened upon the one and highest good, it will fulfil the apostolic words: 'pray without ceasing.' And: 'In every place lifting up pure hands without anger and dissension.' For, if we may speak in this way, when the thoughts of the mind have been seized by this purity and have been refashioned from earthly dullness to the likeness of the spiritual and the angelic, whatever they take in, whatever they reflect upon, and whatever they do will be most pure and sincere prayer' (*Conl.* IX.VI.5). Thus, unceasing prayer, associated with stillness, is not an activity, but, rather, a state of mind concentrated upon God.

We have mentioned earlier the notion of ἀμεριμνία, which monastic writers associate closely with ἡσυχία. It is a somewhat obvious link:

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<sup>1</sup> I owe to C. Stewart the location of these passages, which he lists in *Cassian*. p. 168 n. 46.

concentration and inner peace cannot go together with agitation by cares and lack of faith. This is why Climacus gives ‘the rejection of even reasonable cares (ἄρνησις εὐλόγων φροντίδων)’ (27.51 = 27-2.17 = 1112A) as one of the definitions of ἡσυχία, and emphasises the importance of faith so strongly in this chapter on ἡσυχία (27.68 = 27-2.33-34 = 1113B). The notion appears in the discourse several times. Climacus describes the first task of ἡσυχία as ἀμεριμνία πάντων πραγμάτων, εὐλόγων τε καὶ ἀλόγων (27.46 = 27-2.12 = 1109B). Hausherr rightly points to the significance of this passage, and its correspondence with the Evagrian ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων<sup>1</sup>. However, Climacus’ treatment of ἡσυχία is more advanced than that of Evagrius. It is in the chapter on ἡσυχία that we discover an unexpectedly eloquent explanation of ἀμεριμνία, as well as of the ‘angelic life’ of monasticism. ‘Ἡσυχία is a ‘visible activity and life of the spiritual powers’, both through ἀμεριμνία and participation in never-ending progress in spiritual ascent (27.28 = 27.26 = 1101A).

Earlier on we saw that Evagrius ends his treatise on ἡσυχία with an exhortation to resist demonic attacks. What is distinctive about Climacus’ treatment of ἡσυχία is that it signifies, in a sense, the end of active ascetic struggle, and inviolability to ‘the noises’ (οἱ θόρυβοι). At the beginning of the discourse Climacus says that ‘crowns of peace and tranquillity are woven for those who do not flag in the fight’ (27.1 = 27.1 = 1097A). Further on, he expands: ‘The beginning of ἡσυχία is to throw off all noise as disturbing for the depth of the soul. But the end of it is not to fear disturbances (θορύβους), but to remain insensible to them’ (27.5 = 27.3 = 1097B). This does not mean that demons cease attacks. Rather, the hesychast who has achieved inner stability is

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<sup>1</sup> *Hésychasme*. p. 221.

capable of effective defense. Thus, Climacus links ἡσυχία with νῆψις – another traditional link, as Hausherr and Adnès have shown<sup>1</sup>. Ἠσυχία as inner stillness is only possible if one is vigilant and experienced in resisting demonic temptations: ‘A friend of ἡσυχία is a courageous and decisive thought which keeps constant vigil at the doors of the heart, and kills or repels the thoughts that come’ (27.3 = 27.2 = 1097B). ‘The cat keeps hold of her mouse, and the thought of the hesychast holds his spiritual mouse. Do not call this example rubbish; if you do, then you do not yet know what ἡσυχία means’ (27.7 = 27.6 = 1097BC). This ‘shield’ works not only when one is awake, but also when one is asleep (27.74 = 27-2.43 = 1116B). Climacus is not saying that the warfare is over altogether – on the contrary, ‘nothing can prove the defeat of the demons so clearly as the violence with which they attack us’ (27.49 = 27-2.15 = 1109D). One needs to be particularly cautious regarding ἄκηδία. Ἀκηδία ‘is a constant companion of the ἡσυχαστής. She will never leave him till death, and wrestles with him daily till his end’ (13.4 = 13.3 = 860A), warns Climacus in the thirteenth chapter, which he devotes entirely to ἄκηδία. He reminds the reader about its danger several times in the chapter on ἡσυχία: its danger is in that the demon of ἄκηδία prepares the way for a demon of lust (27.49 = 27-2.15 = 1109D), and a ἡσυχαστής who struggles with it ‘suffers great harm, for the time which should be given to prayer and θεωρία he wastes in tricks and wrestlings to battle against it.’ (27.43 = 27-2.9 = 1109A).

The thought of Climacus may become more understandable to us, if we once again turn to his predecessor, John Cassian. Cassian also associates *tranquillitas cordis* with the inner peace which comes after the struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> Hausherr. *Hesychasme*. pp. 225-237, Adnès. *Hesychasme*. col. 391-392.

Commenting on Psalm 76, he writes: the Lord delights ‘not in the struggle of conflict and in the battle of vice but rather in the peace of chastity and in perpetual tranquillity of heart. If anyone has deserved to arrive at this place of peace through the extinction of his carnal passions, proceeding from this degree he will become a spiritual Zion – that is, observation of God – and will also be His dwelling place. For the Lord dwells not in the struggle of abstinence but rather in the continual observation of virtue. There he does not fight back or suppress the power of the bows from which the fiery darts of wantonness were once aimed at us; instead he destroys them forever.’ (*Conl.* XII.XI.3, cf. *ibid.* XII.VI.5). Thus, ἡσυχία is a gift of God together with being an outcome of struggle, it is, in the words of Hausherr, ‘the peace of Christ, the peace of God ... in the depth of the soul’<sup>1</sup>.

One of the traditional problems associated with solitary life is that of hospitality. Climacus gives a number of instructions. First of all, he urges: ‘Do not expect visits and do not prepare for them beforehand, because the state of ἡσυχία is perfectly simple and free’ (27.74 = 27-2.44 = 1116B). Thus, Climacus wants a solitary to achieve ἀμεριμνία, which, in Cassian’s view, is difficult to achieve precisely because of cares of receiving visitors (*Conl.* XIX.VI.5). Climacus is generally cautious regarding visitors: ‘The model for your stillness ... should be the great and angelic hesychast Arsenius. Remember in your solitude the life of this great solitary, and see how often he sent away those who came to him, so as not to lose the good part. My experience is that the demons often persuade foolish busybodies to visit true hesychasts so as to use even such as those to throw some hindrance in the way of these active men. Look out for

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<sup>1</sup> *Hésychasme*, p. 217.



such people, and do not be afraid of offending these idle bodies by your devout behaviour: because, as a result of this offence, they will perhaps stop in their meddlesomeness. But see that you do not mistakenly offend a soul who, in his thirst, has come to draw water from you.' (27.64-65 = 27-2.29-30 = 1112D-1113A). As Völker pointed out, the rigidity of Arsenius was not seen as exemplary in the desert<sup>1</sup>, and neither does Climacus follow it altogether. Later on, he writes: 'Offer to those who visit you what is necessary both for the body and for the spirit' (27.83 = 27-2.53 = 1116D – 1117A) Thus, the outlook of Climacus is a compromise between a more rigid and a more relaxed attitude, both found in the monastic tradition. While Abba Mark and Abba Poemen would not want to see even their mothers (*Alph.* Mark, Disciple of Abba Silvanus 3, Poemen 76), Abba Apollo said that one should bow before the brethren who come, because 'When you see your brother, you see God' (*Alph.* Apollo 3). Another monk was confused, seeing Arsenius unwilling to speak to him, and then being joyfully accepted by Abba Moses. He has asked God to resolve his confusion, and then 'two large boats were shown to him on a river and he saw Abba Arsenius and the Spirit of God sailing in one, in perfect peace (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ εἰς ἕνα); and in the other was Abba Moses with the angels of God, and they were all eating honey cakes.' (*Alph.* Arsenius 38).

There is yet another aspect of ἡσυχία, that of its relationship with theology in the proper sense of the word. Climacus states categorically that theology is not an intellectual amusement, and the Divine mysteries are not known to a mind not enlightened by God: 'The depth of dogmas is profound, and the mind of the hesychast leaps over them safely. It is not safe to swim in one's clothes, nor

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<sup>1</sup> *Scala*, p. 284. For a detailed analysis of hospitality, solitude and interaction in the desert see Gould. *Fathers*, particularly pp. 146-150, 171-177.

should a slave of passion touch theology' (27.10-11 = 27.9 = 1097C). Evagrius did not necessarily mean theology in the modern sense of the word, when he wrote 'If you are a theologian you truly pray. If you truly pray you are a theologian' (*De Or.* 60). Climacus did. 'He who has attained to ἡσυχία has penetrated to the very depth of the mysteries ... The great Apostle Paul confirms what we have said. If he had not been caught up into paradise, as into ἡσυχία, he could never have heard the unspeakable words. The ear of the hesychast will receive from God marvellous words.' (27.26 = 27.23 = 1100C). The ἄρπαγή of Apostle Paul is alluded to once again in connection with theology once again, when Climacus describes how he questioned an angel regarding abstract theological problems. 'Whether I was then with this clay, I know not; or if out of it, I am quite unable to say', he concludes his narrative (27.47 = 27-2.13 = 1109C). Theological and doctrinal issues cannot be simply a subject of theoretical study, and it is noteworthy that it is to Paul's ecstasy that Climacus relates his theology.

Finally, we may ask: to what extent does the outward ἡσυχία presuppose inward ἡσυχία, as both usages are interwoven in the corresponding chapter? Is ἡσυχία, as monastic ideal, accessible only to the solitaries? In the earlier authors, as we saw, ἡσυχία in the majority of cases is a synonym to ἀναχώρησις. There are a few interesting exceptions to this. Evagrius relates it specifically to life in community: 'The double-tongued monk agitates the brethren, but the faithful one brings ἡσυχία' (*Ad Mon.* 95). Abba John from Cassian's *Conferences*, speaking about his return to coenobium from solitude, describes 'those things with which the soul that is seized by and always intent upon spiritual *theoria* is more particularly hampered – namely, the visits of the

brothers, the duties of welcoming them and bidding them farewell, the returning of visits and the interminable worry that comes from different conversations and occupations, the very expectation of which strains the mind even when these things no longer seem to be nuisances, since this constant and habitual distraction keeps it tense. Thus the freedom of the anchorite, when it is tied down in this way, never at all mounts to that unspeakable joy of heart, and it loses the fruit of the hermit's profession. If this is denied to me now that I am in a community and surrounded by multitudes, at least I do not and lack a peace of soul and a tranquillity of heart free from every preoccupation.' (*Conl.* XIX.VI.5)

Symeon the New Theologian, six centuries later, does not restrict ἡσυχία to ἡσυχάζων (*Cent.* I. 79-80). What is the view of Climacus? We are faced with a difficulty here: at first glance, the chapter on ἡσυχία seems to be simply a guidebook for solitaries. At times it is obvious that Climacus speaks about solitude: he deals extensively with such issues as receiving guests, ἀκηδία, and similar issues, which he otherwise discusses only in connection with the solitary life, etc. Later on, as an example of the true hesychast Climacus gives 'great and ἰσάγγελος' Abba Arsenius (27.64 = 27-2.29 = 1112D), whose monastic life, according to *Apophthegmata*, began from God's call 'Flee from men and be saved' (*Alph.* Arsenius 1) and who later said to another monk: 'God knows I love you, but I cannot live with God and with men' (*Alph.* Arsenius 1).

However, in the middle of the chapter we encounter a saying that this chapter is especially meant for those under obedience (27.39 = 27-2.7 = 1108C). The reason why Climacus does that is perhaps to show all the dangers of solitary life and to discourage monks from entering a premature solitude. As we saw, Climacus discusses this in earlier chapters, only to repeat himself in the chapter

on ἡσυχία: 'He who is sick from some passion and attempts ἡσυχία is like a man who has jumped from a ship into the sea and thinks that he will reach the shore safely on a plank' (27.13 = 27.11 = 1097CD). 'He who is still troubled by bad temper and conceit, by hypocrisy and remembrance of wrongs, should never dare to set foot on the way of ἡσυχία lest he becomes deranged and nothing else' (27.36 = 27-2.5 = 1108A). 'He who has not yet known God is unfit for ἡσυχία, and exposes himself to many dangers. Ἠσυχία chokes the unexperienced; not having tasted the sweetness of God, they waste time in being taken captive, robbed, made despondent and subject to distractions'. (27.55 = 27-2.20 = 1112A).

When Climacus classifies possible motivations for solitude, this quest for the 'sweetness of God' turns out to be the only proper incentive: 'Some enter this harbour<sup>1</sup>, or rather this sea, or perhaps this abyss, because they lack control over their tongue or because of past habit of the body; others because they are without control of their temper and the poor wretches cannot overcome this in a crowded society; others because out of conceit, they have judged it better to sail under their own rule than under direction; others because amidst the material things they cannot abstain from such; some with the intention of cultivating zeal by solitary life; others to torment themselves secretly for their faults; and some in order to acquire glory for themselves from it; others again (if only the Son of Man when He comes may find such on earth) are wedded to holy stillness out of delight and a thirst for the love and sweetness of God' (27.29 = 27-2.1 =

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<sup>1</sup> The expression 'τῆς ἡσυχίας λιμένας' occurs in Barsanuphius of Gaza (*Corr.* 9). Further on, he writes: 'A ship, before arriving into the harbour is hit and battered by waves and winds, when it comes into the harbour, there is great peace' (*Ibid.*). cf. Climacus: 'He who has attained to ἡσυχία has penetrated to the very depth of the mysteries, but he would never have descended into the deep unless he had first seen and heard the noise of the waves and the evil spirits, and perhaps even been splashed by these waves' (27.26 = 27.23 = 1100C).

1105AB). He would then define the hesychast as ‘one who flees all men, though without hatred, just as another hastens to them, though without enthusiasm; he does not wish to be hindered from partaking of the sweetness of God’ (27.27 = 27.6 = 1100D). Thus, these three passages show that this ‘sweetness of God’<sup>1</sup> is not only the inspiration for solitude, but also the meaning of ἡσυχία. The following passage from *Apophthegmata*, although not containing the actual word ἡσυχία, expresses the same thought: ‘One of the saints said: it is impossible for a man, as long as he enjoys the sweetness of the world, to enjoy the sweetness of God. But in order to taste the sweetness of God, one must hate the world, for it is written: No one can serve two masters. And for us, as long as we desire the company of people and repose of the body, it is impossible to enjoy the sweetness of God’ (*Syst.* II.34).

However, outward ἡσυχία in the *Scala* does not necessarily suggest complete solitude (e.g. 1.26 = 1.47 = 641D). Climacus also distinguishes μοναζόντοι as a special category among the ἡσυχάζοντοι (27.66 = 27-2.31 = 1113A), being an alternative to life in a coenobium. Finally, it must be noted that nowhere in the *Scala* does Climacus explicitly state that the state of ἡσυχία is a prerogative of a solitary. It is interesting that it is from monks living in a community that Climacus awaits instruction on ἡσυχία (4.35 = 4.30 = 700A). But what is probably the key passage may be found in *Ad Pastorem*: ‘It is truly a great thing to endure courageously and manfully the burning heat, the tranquillity, and the deprivation suffered in stillness (τῆς ἡσυχίας), and not to seek after distractions and comforts outside the barque of one’s cell, after the manner of careless sailors who swim about in the water during a calm. Yet it is

<sup>1</sup> The expression γλυκύτητος Θεοῦ, which Climacus uses, occurs also Macarius: *Coll.* B 21.1.11 and 31.1.2, *Coll.* H 29.14, Cyril of Skythopolis *Vita Joannis Hesychastae* 211.26.

incomparably greater to have no fear of turmoil (τοὺς θορύβους), and to remain steadfast under its assault with a fearless heart, while living with men outwardly, but with God inwardly' (*Ad Past.* 43 = 1185A). Perhaps Climacus would agree with the words of Amma Syncletica, 'It is possible to be a ἡσυχαστής in one's mind while living in a crowd, and it is possible for one who is a ἡσυχαστής to live in the crowd of his own thoughts' (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Syncletica 19).

## ***SPIRITUAL FATHERHOOD***

### ***Introduction***

The importance of discernment and obedience (the chief and only condition of spiritual guidance on behalf of a disciple) in Climacus' synthesis can be observed from the fact that the two respective chapters are the longest in the *Scala* and altogether constitute approximately its third part. Both themes were present in the monastic tradition since its emergence, and their presentation in the *Scala* can only be understood in the context of this tradition, to which Climacus belonged.

Spiritual guidance was not merely a theoretical instruction, but from its very outset was understood as *fatherhood*. 'For though you might have ten thousand guardians (παιδαγωγούς) in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel', Paul addressed his flock (1 Cor. 4.15). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century catechetical schools Clement and Origen did not limit themselves to purely academic instruction. According to Clement, catechists in Alexandria were addressed 'father' (*Strom.* 1.1.2). He represents the pedagogue as an image of God, whose task is to train to a virtuous, not to an intellectual (σώφρονός τε, οὐκ ἐπι᾿στημονικοῦ) life. (*Paed.* 1.1).

Gregory Thaumaturgus' *In Origenem Orat. Pan.* shows that the relationship between the teacher and a pupil was characterized by personal friendship, which Gregory likens to that of David and Jonathan, and by the personal holiness of a teacher, who had reached sanctity and perfection. Gregory tells us about his teacher: 'He did not aim merely at getting round us by any kind of reasoning; but his desire was, with a benignant, and affectionate, and most benevolent mind, to save us, and make us partakers of the blessings which flow from philosophy, and most especially also in those other gifts which the Deity has bestowed on him above most men, or, as we may perhaps say, above all men of our own time. I mean the power that teaches us piety, the word of salvation, that comes to many, and subdues to itself all whom it visits ... And thus, like some spark lighting up our inmost soul, love was kindled and burst into flame within us – a love at once to the Holy Word, the most lovely object of all, and to this man, his friend and advocate' (6).

Discipleship, as an aspect of spiritual guidance, means that the truth about the correct mode of life is made known to us through the tradition, παράδοσις. Even Anthony, the father of monasticism, is said to have received guidance regarding the ascetic life from numerous other 'zealous souls' practising it (*Vita Antonii* 3-4). Likewise, Pachomius had Palamon as an instructor (*SBo* 10-18, *GI* 6-13). As Basil the Great had put it, 'If you place yourself in the hands of a man rich in virtue, you will become the heir of the good qualities he possesses and you will be supremely blessed in the eyes of both God and man' (*Serm. De Remunt. Saec.* PG 31 632D – 633A). Similarly, John Cassian exhorts his readers: 'we should not follow in the footprints of all the elders whose heads are covered with grey hair and whose long life is the only thing that recommends them, nor

should we accept their traditions and counsel. Instead we should follow those ... who have been instructed not in their own presumptions but in the tradition of the forebears' (*Conl.* II.XIII.2). Thus, modern scholars speak about the 'pedigree of spiritual authority'<sup>1</sup> in ancient monasticism. Climacus, too, saw himself and his contemporaries as occupying a certain place within this tradition, and being indebted to it. He presents the *Scala* not as his own creation, but as a summary of the experience of a chain of ascetics who were his predecessors, often referring to the authority of the 'fathers' (4.8 = 4.10 = 681A, 7.32 = 7.34 = 808B, 15.74 = 15.73 = 896C, 15.75 = 15.73 = 897B, 17.16 = 16.24 = 929B, 25.62 = 25.59 = 1001B, 26.73 = 26.46 = 1028D). Thus, sanctity cannot be achieved in isolation from the tradition of the Church and from those whose life is the embodiment of this tradition.

In the emergence of the monastic tradition, the understanding of spiritual direction as fatherhood became central<sup>2</sup>. *Vita Antonii* describes Anthony as 'a father and a guide to all' (15). In the *Apophthegmata*, too, the role of *abba* cannot be overestimated<sup>3</sup> – while following the advice of an elder was a sure way to salvation, relying on one's own judgments was bound to fail (*Alph.* Anthony 37, 38). This approach was taken up by later tradition (Cassian *Conl.* II.X.1 Mark the Monk *Nic.*V.20-29), to be adopted by John Climacus (26.s53 = 26-3.45 = 1089B).

On the whole, Climacus lays a great stress on submitting human will to the Divine will, and this emphasis provides a solid theological foundation for his conception of spiritual guidance and discernment. If in the primary stage of one's

<sup>1</sup> Chitty. *Desert*. p. 67-68, Rousseau. *Ascetics*. 24.

<sup>2</sup> See С. Смирнов. *Духовный отец в древней Восточной Церкви*, в. 1. Sergiev Posad, 1906. pp. 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> See B. Ward. *Spiritual Direction in the Desert Fathers. The Way*, 24. 1984. pp. 61-70.



monastic life one's will is submitted to the guide, and, through this act of submission, to God, the secondary stage is characterised by the capacity of the immediate cognition of the divine will.

### ***Guide and disciple***

Climacus encourages a disciple to test a guide before self-submission: 'We ought first to question and examine, and even, so to speak test our helmsman, so as not to mistake the sailor for the pilot, a sick man for a doctor, a passionate for a dispassionate man, the sea for a harbour, and so to bring about the speedy shipwreck of our soul.' (4.6 = 4.7 = 680CD) This is the initial demonstration of discernment on behalf of a disciple (see also 4.94 = 4.91 = 716A).

Likewise, a guide is also free to reject or to accept a disciple (*Ad Past.* 89 = 1196C), and Climacus gives an example of such reluctance (4.112 = 4.113 = 721D-724A). Thus, Climacus establishes freedom as the foundation of a relationship.

Climacus does not recommend abandoning one guide for another one (4.72 = 4.67 = 709D-712A). Nevertheless, if a guide recognizes himself to be incompetent, another one should be consulted (4.70 = 4.63 = 709C).

More than once Climacus uses the image of Moses to describe a spiritual guide (1.7 = 1.14-15 = 633D – 636A, 4.121 = 4.127 = 725D, *Ad Past.* 99-100 = 1201A-1204C). It is noteworthy, that, together with the author of *Vita* and with John, Abbot of Raithou, at whose request the *Scala* was written, Climacus sees Moses principally not as much as a law-giver, but as a contemplator of God (e.g. 3.11 = 3.15 = 665C, 5.38 = 5.24 = 780BC, 15.41 = 15.39 = 888D, 30.17 = 30.11

= 1157B, *Ad Past.* 100 = 1204C)<sup>1</sup>. For the first time Climacus introduces the image of Moses in the passage from the first chapter quoted below, to unfold it the concluding section of *Ad Past.*

‘Those of us who wish to go out of Egypt, and to fly from Pharaoh, certainly need some Moses as a mediator with God and from God, who, standing between action and contemplation (πρᾶξις καὶ θεωρία), will raise hands of prayer for us to God, so that guided by him we may cross the sea of sin and rout the Amalek of the passions. That is why those who have surrendered themselves to God deceive themselves if they suppose they have no need of a director. Those who came out of Egypt had Moses as their guide, and those who fled from Sodom had an angel. The former are like those, who are healed of the passions of the soul by the care of physicians; these are they who come out of Egypt. The latter are like those who long to put off the uncleanness of the wretched body. That is why they need a helper, an angel, so to speak, or rather, equal to an angel. For in accordance with the corruption of our wounds, we need a director who is indeed an expert and a physician’ (1.7 = 1.14-15 = 633D – 636B).

In this passage Climacus brings out several concepts central to his understanding of spiritual fatherhood, and which he expounds further on in the treatise.

First of all, Climacus describes the guide as an intercessor<sup>2</sup>. The task of a guide is to take care of his disciples not only through his instruction, but also through his prayer, and Climacus believes that prayer of a guide for his disciples as has particular power. Climacus’ *Vita* describes Moses, a disciple of Climacus,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 2.92.

<sup>2</sup> For the more precise analysis of Climacus’ terminology of a guide as a doctor (ιατρός), counsellor (σύμβουλος), intercessor (πρεσβευτής), mediator (μεσίτης) and sponsor (ἀνάδοχος) see K. Ware. *The Spiritual Father in Saint John Climacus and Saint Symeon the New Theologian*. SP 28,2. Kalamazoo-Louven, 1989. p. 302ff.

being saved by his prayer from a huge rock, which had almost fallen upon him. The same Moses through Climacus' prayer was relieved from 'the demon of carnality'. The author of the addition to the *Vita* describes the effect of Climacus' prayer on the drought in Palestine. The author of the *Vita* believed that Climacus' prayerful intercession did not cease with his death<sup>1</sup>. The *Scala* contains a vision of a guide, which could have given ground for the aforementioned accounts. Someone who submits himself to a guide has a 'superior's protection through prayer' as a 'helmet of salvation' (4.2 = 4.2 = 677D). Climacus makes an extraordinary statement, which, at the same time, clarifies his vision of guidance and obedience: 'It is better to sin against God than against our father; for when we anger God, our father can reconcile us; but when he is incensed against us, we no longer have anyone to make propitiation for us' (4.121 = 4.127 = 725D). This power of reconciliation is one of the main characteristics of a true guide: 'A shepherd is pre-eminently he that is able to seek out and set aright his lost, rational sheep by means of guilelessness, zeal, and prayer' (*Ad Past.* 2 = 1165B). The power and prayer of a true shepherd are all-embracing: 'Just as those who behold the face of a king and have him as their friend, if they wish, reconcile any of the king's servants, and perhaps strangers and even enemies to the king, and make them partakers of his glory; so should it be understood concerning holy men' (*Ad Past.* 15 = 1172D)<sup>2</sup>.

In the passage quoted Climacus also describes a guide as a physician<sup>3</sup> – an image which he will develop in *Ad Past.* 10-12 = 1168D-1169B, fully employing

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Alph.* Arsenius 35.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Sbo.* 101.

<sup>3</sup> He often describes a coenobium as a hospital (1.18-19 = 1.33-34 = 637D-640A, 4.94 = 4.91 = 716A), and a pastor as a physician (4.28 = 4.24 = 693B, 4.33 = 4.28 = 697B, 4.62 = 4.56 = 708D, 4.70 = 4.63 = 709C, 4.94 = 4.91 = 716A, 5.26 = 5.5 = 776D, 23.38 = 23.1 = 976B etc.). Most probably the image is borrowed from Basil the Great (*Reg. Fus. Tract.* 28, *Reg. Brev. Tract.* 229)

the medical imagery of plasters, razors, instruments for blood-letting etc. Although the image of a physician does imply violence, for a pupil nevertheless it is a blessing to give his soul to a spiritual doctor. It does not exclude the 'courtesy and kindness' of a physician, and it is these qualities of a guide, which may change the course of one's life (e.g. 1.18 = 1.33 = 637D-640A).

Another image which Climacus likes to use to describe spiritual direction, is that of a ship and a pilot (κυβερνήτης) (4.70 = 4.64 = 709D, 26.s52 = 26-3.44 = 1089B, *Ad Past.* 7 = 1168A, *Ibid.* 36 = 1184A)<sup>1</sup>. It is not possible to guide a ship unless the pilot has himself explored the way and all the possible dangers. This knowledge and even experience of falls is not an obstacle for guidance, but on the contrary it gives the necessary qualification:

'Let those who have been humbled by their former bad habits take courage. For even if they fall into every pit and are trapped in all the snares and suffer all maladies, yet after restoration to health they become physicians, beacons, lamps and pilots for all, teaching us the habits of every disease and from their own personal experience able to rescue those who are about to fall' (26.13 = 26.11 = 1016B).

As far as the life under obedience is concerned, Climacus is straightforward – throughout his writings, he insists on a total obedience to one's director<sup>2</sup>. A guide should not tolerate disobedience, and a disobedient monk should be expelled (*Ad Past.* 94 = 1200B)<sup>3</sup>. Spiritual guidance for Climacus is only possible on condition of total renunciation of one's will and submitting it to a

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or from Gregory of Nazianzus (2.16-21). See also Clement of Alexandria. *Paed.* 1.1, *Vita Antonii* 87, John Chrysostom. *De Sacer.* 2.2-3, 4.3, and elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus. *Or.* 2.5.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular Ch. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Note the contrast with Mark the Monk 'If someone does not obey you when you have told him once, do not argue and try to compel him; but take for yourself the profit which he has thrown away. For forbearance will benefit you more than correcting him' *Justif.* 200).

guide, and a guide is only responsible for his pupil to the extent to which the pupil obeys him (*Ad Past.* 7 = 1168A). However, on condition of the complete submission of will a guide becomes totally responsible for his disciple before God both in this life and in the age to come (4.3 = 4.4 = 680A, 4.50 = 4.43 = 705B)<sup>1</sup>, while an obedient disciple escapes judgement (4.9 = 4.11 = 681AB). On behalf of a monk, Climacus demands an obedience, which by ordinary human standards cannot be justified. A disciple is to obey his guide even if he orders something apparently contrary to our salvation. (4.104 = 4.104 = 717B). On one occasion an elder instructs the novices in their attitude to a guide, saying: ‘Even if you see him committing fornication, do not leave him, but say to yourself: “Friend, wherefore art thou come?”’ (4.112 = 4.113 = 724B)<sup>2</sup>. Climacus describes an eighty-year-old monk, the second priest of the monastery, who for no particular reason was left by the abbot without lunch and had to stand for an hour or two while the meal was still on (4.25 = 4.23 = 692A). Another good example of Climacus’ attitude towards obedience is a story about a certain Isidore, who was commanded by his abbot to sit by the gates of the monastery, make a prostration to anyone coming in or out and say: ‘Pray for me, father, for I am an epileptic’, which he did continuously for seven years (4.23 = 4.21 = 689AB).

How traditional is Climacus in his insistence on the total submission of the will to the spiritual guide? Obedience has been a distinctive mark of Christian monasticism from its very outset. One has no difficulty in finding examples of obedience in monastic literature, which a modern reader may find discouraging, not to say horrendous. Anthony tests the obedience of Paul the Simple by spilling

<sup>1</sup> cf. John Chrysostom. *De Sacer.* 2.2, Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 58, 288, 614.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Apophthegmata Alph. Poemen* 189, where Poemen discharges a monk from living with his *abba*, adding: ‘When someone sees that he is in danger of losing his soul, he does not need to ask advice’.

honey and making him gather it without collecting any dirt, unstitching his cloak and ordering Paul to sew it up again, etc. (*Historia Monachorum* 24). The *abba* of John the Dwarf ordered him to water a piece of dry wood every day, while the way there and back to get water took a night, before it finally bore fruit in three years (*Alph.* John the Dwarf 1).

However, in early Christian literature one can find a somewhat different approach, expressed in the insistence on the necessity for a guide to safeguard the free will of man and to act ‘not by force but by persuasion’, for ‘the reception of the treatment depends on the will of the patient, not of him who applies the remedy’ (John Chrysostom *De Sacer.* 2.2.). According to Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘what is involuntary apart from its being the result of oppression, is neither meritorious nor durable’ (*Or.* 2.15). Even some later monastic authors, like Mark the Monk and Barsanuphius of Gaza, may be found to be not as austere as Climacus in their understanding of spiritual guidance and disobeying instructions of a guide. Thus, Mark the Monk, giving an advice in a letter to Nicholas the Solitary, wrote: ‘In recommending this rule we do not wish to impose on you a yoke of compulsion; but with love we advise it ... leaving it to your own free choice to do as you wish’ (*Nic.* VII. 69-74). Elsewhere Mark insists on obedience (*Justif.* 120, 147, 198), distinguishing between spiritual instruction to someone under authority, which must be obeyed, and advice to someone who is not. Thus, total obedience should only be expected from those under direct authority, others should just be given advice (συμβουλία) (*Justif.* 166), and the passage from the letter quoted above most probably represents the latter case. A similar distinction between ‘command’ (ἐντολή) and ‘advice’ (συμβουλή) (368), ἐντολή and γνώμη (56) or ἀνάγκη and συμβουλία (92) may be found in the

*Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John, who elsewhere emphasise the free will of recipients of their advices (e.g. 35, 51, 691).

Most probably the *Scala* reflects the later standard monastic understanding of the issue, as well as the developed ethics of monastic behaviour, reflecting faith in the word of a guide, characteristic of monastic tradition in general. In the *Apophthegmata* the elders are often approached with a simple formula 'Give me a word', in Rousseau's words, 'trusting that the dialogue would answer their deepest need'<sup>1</sup>. It is said that 'If someone has faith in another, and hands himself over to him in complete submission, he does need to pay attention to God's commands but he can entrust his whole life to his father' (*Apophthegmata Anon.* 290). This was the expression of not only of faith in the inspiration of an *abba*, but also in the weight and importance of every word pronounced. The monastic tradition had preserved in its memory the words 'By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned' (Mt. 12.37). Thus, the word of an *abba* was not seen as merely a direction or advice, but a shortcut to salvation. In the words of Mark the Monk, 'To accept words of truth is to accept the divine Word; for He says, "He that receives you receives me" (Mt 10.40). (*Leg.* 131). In the *Justif.* he has a stronger statement: 'He who speaks rightly should recognize that he receives the words from God. For the truth belongs not to him who speaks, but to God, who is energizing (ἐνεργοῦντος) him.' (*Justif.* 168). Barsanuphius applied this to himself: 'I have written to your love these words written by me, or rather, by God' (*Corr.* 22, cf. 225). We may want to distinguish between a disciple accepting the words of his master as inspired by God, and the master himself understanding his instruction in this way, but it is

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<sup>1</sup> Rousseau. *Ascetics*. p. 19.

doubtful that the aforementioned writers saw the question this way. For them, these aspects belonged to the same reality – that of the continuous operation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It is the holiness of a guide that constitutes the basis of his authority. Therefore, when Climacus writes that a director is not to be abandoned even if he commits fornication, this saying should not be understood, of course, as Climacus' acceptance of such a possibility, but merely as an expression of his awareness of the subjectivity of one's perception, which is liable to demonic temptations (10.17 = 10.18 = 849A)<sup>1</sup>.

The notion of the unconditional obedience of a monk to his director may be easily misunderstood. However, we must remember that ancient monks did not operate with concepts of individual free will. The universe was governed by *taxis*, and the individual will was submitted to it. As far as the austerities of the monastic edification are concerned, it has been pointed out by Hausherr, 'For the ancients, *paideusis* (instruction) did not come without powerful discipline'<sup>2</sup>. Too many examples could be given to support this statement, but the point is clear – reducing monastic obedience and edification to mere humility and embarrassment of a monk would be an oversimplification.

There is more to Climacus' view of spiritual direction than the authoritarian and despotic treatment of the flock by a spiritual father. After all, Climacus writes in a monastic context, and nothing in the *Scala* indicates that he saw the same methods as appropriate for the spiritual direction of lay people, although Climacus seems to have been offering guidance not only to monks, but also to

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of such delusion are *Apophthegmata Alph.* Elias 4, Nicetas.

<sup>2</sup> *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*. Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1981 (CS 116). p. 75.



married laymen (1.21 = 1.38 = 640C)<sup>1</sup>. Submission of one's will was an *a priori* condition of monastic life for Climacus' readers. Moreover, the emphasis on the total renunciation of one's will in spiritual guidance must not be considered in isolation from an equally heavy emphasis which Climacus lays on the spiritual integrity of a guide. This emphasis is by no means an innovation. 'A man must himself be cleansed, before cleansing others: himself become wise, that he may make others wise; become light, and then give light: draw near to God, and so bring others near; be hallowed, then hallow them; be possessed of hands to lead others by the hand, of wisdom to give advice', wrote Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or.* 2.71) three hundred years before Climacus. The commandment of the desert fathers was: 'Do not judge yourself, but live with someone who knows how to behave himself properly.' (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Poemen 73). Thus, the guide instructs by his own personality and example as much by his word. Pachomius' disciple Horsiesios addressed the superiors of the monasteries: 'Do not misuse your authority arrogantly, but offer yourself as an example to everyone and to the flock under you, like our Lord, who gave himself as an example in everything' (*Hors. test.* 13). Again, the *Apophthegmata* provide us with the liveliest example of such outlook:

'Three Fathers used to go and visit blessed Anthony every year and two of them used to discuss their thoughts and the salvation of their souls with him, but the third always remained silent and did not ask him for anything. After a long time, Abba Anthony said to him, 'You often come here to see me, but you never

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<sup>1</sup> The practice of lay people receiving spiritual instruction from monks was not unusual. See *Itinerarium Egeriae* 20-21, epistles of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (*Corr.* 637-692), *Vita Sancti Georgii Chozibitae* 25 etc, also Смирнов. *Op. Cit.* pt. 3 and Hausherr's synopsis: *Direction.* pp. 306-332.

ask me anything,' and the other replied, 'It is enough for me to see you, Father' (*Alph. Anthony* 27).

Climacus develops this line of thought to the fullest extent. For Climacus, the behaviour of a guide is as important as his instruction (*Ad Past.* 6 = 1165C). It is important that the good example of a guide safeguards a disciple in case he loses faith and trust in him (4.7 = 4.8 = 680D). It is not accidental, that the full title of his treatise *Ad Pastorem* in some manuscripts is 'A letter to the shepherd, teaching what a guide of rational sheep should be like'. Although this title does not go back to Climacus himself, it clearly expresses the message of the treatise – not what a shepherd needs to say, or how to behave, but what to be. The perfect example of Climacus' exalted vision of a true spiritual guide is the concluding chapter of *Ad Pastorem* (too long to be cited here), which can be read as a beautifully composed ode to all those, who succeeded in the art of the guidance of souls, as well as a warning and admonition to anyone who has accepted the burden of spiritual direction or is intending to do so. Climacus calls to the *sanctity* of a guide, as the only condition of making him a real guide, capable of bringing souls to God. In this respect (as well as in most others), Climacus leaves no space for compromise.

Understanding spiritual guide as an image of Christ makes Climacus emphasize the responsibility, which a guide should be aware of:

'According to the great faith which the superior sees in his disciples and in outsiders towards himself in everything he does and says, understanding that all look upon him as an archetypal image (ἀρχέτυπος εἰκόν), and so they consider whatever he says and does as a standard and a law' (*Ad Past.* 23 = 1177B).

For Climacus, it is through his holiness that a spiritual director is an image of Christ. An eighty-year old monk, who was deprived of supper by the abbot, later confessed to Climacus: 'I thought of the shepherd as the image of Christ, and I considered that I had not received the command from him at all, but from God' (4.26 = 4.23 = 692B, also *Ad Past.* 94 = 1200D). Nevertheless, a guide is not understood by Climacus to be a passive medium. For Climacus, it is God, who is the Guide, and it is Christ, who is the Shepherd. This is why Climacus could say that offending God and one's master is essentially the same thing (4.121 = 4.127 = 728A).

However, for Climacus the attitude of the disciple to his guide is not only that of unquestioning obedience and trust, but also that of love and spiritual attachment. Climacus advises:

'Spiritually show God your faith in your father and your sincere love for him. And God, in unknown ways, will suggest him that he become attached to you and kindly disposed towards you, just as you are well disposed towards him' (4.45 = 4.39 = 705A).

As Climacus was told by a certain abbot, 'A soul, attached to the shepherd with love and faith for Christ's sake will not leave him even if it were at the price of his blood, and especially if he has received through him the healing of his wounds ... But if the soul is not attached, bound and devoted to the shepherd in this way, then I wonder if such a man is living in this place in vain, for he is united by a hypocritical and false obedience' (4.28 = 4.24 = 693BC).

At the same time, for a guide the soul of his disciple should not be simply an object of manipulation, neither should the submission of will to the spiritual guide and total obedience to him provoke violence on his behalf:

‘And let this be one of the prayers of the superior; to be disposed and compassionate to each according to his merit, lest, as it occurred to Jacob, he harm both his beloved disciple and the entire brotherhood’ (*Ad Past.* 14 = 1169C).

Both guide and disciple follow the example of Christ not only through submission of their human will to the Divine will, but also by the *kenosis* of their mutual love. ‘A true shepherd shows love, for by reason of love the Good Shepherd was crucified’ (*Ad Past.* 24 = 1177B).

By saying that the love of a guide is the same love as that of the Shepherd crucified for his sheep, Climacus brings a sacrificial dimension to spiritual guidance, and a true guide is characterized by the measure of sacrifice which he undertakes: ‘spiritual responsibility (ἀναδοχή) in the proper sense is a laying down of one’s soul on behalf of one’s neighbour in all matters’ (*Ad Past.* 57 = 1189B). Like the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world (Jn 1.29), a spiritual father also carries the burden of the others’ sins upon himself (3.15 = 3.20 = 665D, 4.5 = 4.6 = 680B, 4.9 = 4.11 = 681B, 23.52 = 23.14 = 980AB, 24.31 = 24.14 = 984C, *Ad Past.* 45 = 1185B), an idea, especially prominent in Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (*Corr.* 48, 72, 73, 239, 270, 614).

We have discussed earlier the significance of monasticism as martyrdom. It is not accidental that Climacus uses the language of martyrdom and confession (ὁμολογία) (4.5 = 4.6 = 680B, 4.8 = 4.10 = 681A, 4.30 = 4.25 = 696A, 4.44 = 4.37 = 704D, 4.107 = 4.107 = 717CD), when he speaks about obedience. The monks are the army of the First Martyr, that is, of Christ (4.68 = 4.60 = 709C). Thus, Climacus writes that ‘a simple-hearted monk is like a rational and obedient dumb animal, who lays his burden on his director. An animal does not answer

back his master who yokes him, nor does an upright soul do it with his superior, but follows wherever he is led; though sent to the slaughter, he knows not to make protest' (24.31 = 24.14 = 984C). By saying this, Climacus most certainly alludes to Is 53.7: 'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.'

Apart from expounding a positive teaching on spiritual guidance, Climacus also warns against those guides who do not have the necessary spiritual integrity – a problem, which has been relevant in the Church from the earliest period of Church history to the present day. In the words of J. Chryssavgis, 'the Christian classics of spiritual literature will not normally question the responsibility proper to the director; rarely will they dwell on the results of improper direction. Only general advice will be offered by the early Christian writers against the possible harm in submitting oneself to a master without experience or to one still subject to the passions, because he might initiate one into the diabolical life instead of the evangelical.'<sup>1</sup> Although this is true, nevertheless the value of the writings, witnessing the problem of incapable spiritual directors should not be underestimated.

Climacus' instructions in this respect are addressed both to negligent guides, and to those seeking authentic spiritual guidance.

Climacus narrates a colourful story about a novice, Acacius, who was regularly abused by his master. 'Seeing him daily in wretched plight like the lowest slave', writes Climacus, 'I would ask him when I met him: "What is the matter, Brother Acacius, how are you today?" And he would show me a black

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<sup>1</sup> 'Spiritual Direction: Problems and Perspectives in the Early Monastic Tradition'. In: *Sobornost* 18:2. 1996. p. 44.

eye, or a scarred neck or head'. When eventually he died, and his master disbelieved the news about his death, he came to Acacius' body and asked: 'Are you dead, brother Acacius?' to which Acacius replied: 'How is it possible, Father, for a man who is a doer of obedience, to die?' 'Then the elder who had been Acacius' master became terrified and fell on his face in tears. Afterwards he asked the abbot of the Lavra for a cell near the tomb, and lived in it devoutly, always saying to the fathers: "I have committed a murder" (4.110 = 4.111 = 720B-721A). Although by placing this narrative into the chapter of obedience Climacus gives a lesson of obedience to novices, his description of the elder as 'careless and dissolute' (ἀμελής καὶ ἀκόλαστος) suggests that the lesson for guides is also there – the obedience of disciples should not be abused. Physical abuse of young monks seems to have been uncommon, but, nevertheless, was condemned. An edifying story may be found in *Vita Sancti Georgii Chozibitae*: the elder, who was 'advanced in the ascetical life', strikes young George and his hand becomes paralyzed. He only received healing in return for George's prayers (4-5). The message is the same as in the *Testament of Horsiesios*: 'Let us not despise any soul, lest anyone perishes through our hardness of heart. For, if anyone dies on our account, our soul will be guilty of this' (*Hors. test.* 13)

It seems from Climacus' presentation that his caution towards improper guides results from his own experience. 'I have seen an unskilled physician who, by subjecting to dishonour a sick man who was contrite in spirit, only drove him to despair'<sup>1</sup> (26.26 = 26.21 = 1020BC). 'I have seen another, because of self-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Chrysostom. *De Sacer.* 2.4, 3.18, John Cassian. *Conl.* II.XIII.4-11. 'Learn to be compassionate towards those who struggle, and never struggle with bleak despair those who are in trouble or unsettle them with harsh words. Instead, encourage them mildly and gently' (*Ibid.* II.XIII.10). 'Not only are someone's openly confessed sins not be reproached, but also that the pain of a suffering person is not to be despised in belittling fashion' (*Ibid.* II.XIII.12).

esteem, desire to demonstrate to his children his own unwise wisdom, and acted ironically towards them' (*Ad Past.* 40 = 1184C).

One should take great caution before undertaking the task of spiritual guidance, which has great dangers for the inexperienced: 'Some men, setting at naught the responsibility for taking charge of others, have undertaken unreasonably to shepherd souls; and although they possessed great riches beforehand, they departed from this life with empty hands, having dispersed it among others through the spiritual responsibility which they assumed' (*Ad Past.* 56 = 1089A). However, if the motivation of accepting the burden of guidance is 'spiritual love', even those who accept it 'beyond their strength', are fulfilling the commandment of Christ 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend' (Jn 15.13)<sup>1</sup>, and, through their sacrifice, are in a better position than those who, having such power from God, nevertheless refrain from embarking on this task – Climacus goes as far as to call them 'wretched' (*Ad Past.* 59 = 1189C, see also *Ibid.* 76 = 1193C). The fulfilment of this commandment of Christ overcomes personal failures: 'I have seen one infirm man, by reason of his faith, heal the infirmity of another infirm man by employing praiseworthy shamelessness before God for his sake, and in humility laying down his soul for that brother's soul; and through the healing of the latter, the former healed his own soul as well' (*Ad Past.* 73 = 1193B). Climacus is ready to accept that 'the profit of a word has often compensated for the dearth of deeds' (26.155 = 26-2.40 = 1068C), at the same time distinguishing between teaching and having authority (26.14 = 26.12 = 1061B).

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<sup>1</sup> See also a similar idea in *Ad Past.* 73 = 1193B, where Climacus uses the same Scripture allusion. It is interesting that John Chrysostom uses Jn 15.13 to arrive to the same conclusion: love alone may be sufficient for direction (*De Sacer.* 2.6).

Some of Climacus' predecessors had many bitter words to say about contemporary instructors, who thought that their monastic profession is sufficient for spiritual guidance, but who were thought by the people to have ascended spiritual heights. John Chrysostom criticized those pastors who 'on account of sloth, or wickedness, or even inexperience, abuse the office' (*De Sacer.* 4.1). John Cassian tells about a certain elder, who became angry with a brother upon his confession of λογισμοὶ and thus discouraged other monks to make their confessions (*Conl.* II.XII). He admits that 'there are some – and, more is the pity, they are the majority – who ... claim authority for themselves based not on their mature behaviour but on their many years ... The clever enemy offers their grey hairs as a special authority for the deception of young men ... and by their teachings leads them into either a harmful lukewarmness or a deadly hopelessness' (*Conl.* II.XIII.2-3). Similarly, Nilus of Ancyra warned against 'self-appointed teachers who lack personal experience, and do not even listen when others speak to them. Relying solely on their own self-assurance, they order their brethren to wait on them like slaves. They glory in this one thing: to have many disciples. Their main objective is to ensure, that, when they go about in public, their retinue of followers is no smaller than those of their rivals. They behave like mountebanks rather than teachers. They think nothing of giving orders, however burdensome, but they fail to teach others by their own conduct. Thus they make their position obvious to all: they have insinuated themselves into a position of leadership, not for the benefit of their disciples, but to promote their own pleasure' (*Liber de Monastica Exertatione* 752C)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For spiritual authority in Nilus of Ancyra see M.L. Birkel. *The Contemplative as Prophet: Monastic Authority in the Works of Nilus of Ancyra*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International. 1986. pp. 160-200.



However, Climacus makes it clear that, being dependent upon the spiritual integrity of a guide, spiritual direction is also effective owing to the faith of the apprentice. This is something that a guide should remember:

‘You and all shepherds should inquire into this also: whether, for the most part, grace has deigned to work through us not on account of our purity, but because of the faith of those who come to us, for even many passionate men have worked miracles in this manner’ (*Ad Past.* 51 = 1188A)<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, bringing God as the key figure in spiritual guidance, Climacus safeguards the humility of a guide, preventing him from ascribing to himself the work done by God.

### ***Discernment***

One of the key concepts in Climacus’ understanding of spiritual direction is that of discernment (διάκρισις). This theme occupies a prominent place in patristic literature<sup>2</sup>.

While most fathers prefer so speak about the ‘discernment of spirits’, Climacus usually he speaks of discernment as a broader spiritual category. Even reading the chapter on discernment, one can notice that Climacus does not say much about what discernment is, but, rather, he shows the ways of applying it in different situations: as an all-embracing category, discernment escapes strict definition. If we want to generalise the different usages of this concept, probably the most suitable word to describe Climacus’ treatment of discernment is *vision*, and in this context he brings in the “eye” imagery (26.100 = 26.72 = 1033C,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mark the Monk *Leg.* 80: ‘A man advises a neighbour according to his own understanding; but if the one who listens to such advice, God acts in proportion to his faith’. Cf. Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 363, 693.

<sup>2</sup> See Lienhard, J.T. *On Discernment of Spirits in the Early Church*. In: TS vol. 41 (1980) pp. 505-529 and Hausherr, *Direction*, pp. 77-98. The full bibliography may be found at: <http://www.osb.org/rb/rbbib/b2discretio.html>

26.109 = not in Sophronius' text = 1036C)<sup>1</sup>. Discernment is the capacity of 'the eye of the soul', which is 'spiritual and extremely beautiful' (26.100 = 26.72 = 1033C), it is 'the illumination of those whose sight is dim' (26.137 = 26-2.22 = 1064B). 'The eyes of our body are a light for all the bodily members; and the discernment of the divine virtues is a light for the mind' (26.109 = not in Sophronius' text = 1036C)<sup>2</sup>. 'The body is enlightened by its two corporeal eyes; but in visual and spiritual discernment, the eyes of the heart are illumined' (26.189 = 26-2.70 = 1076A). If *διάκρισις* means a vision of the world and of God as He really is, under the demonic influence the human vision of the situation is distorted, a theme which we discussed when speaking about passion.

This clear vision also involves the awareness of the Divine providence – a theme which Climacus makes use of in the chapter dedicated to *διάκρισις* (26.24 = 26.19 = 1020B, 26.83 = 26.45 = 1029B, 26.101 = 26.74 = 1033D, 26.129 = 26-2.14 = 1061BC, 26.159 = 26-2.44 = 1069A). The theme of the Divine Providence corresponds to the theme of the Divine will and the necessity to conform to it, as the very notion of Providence suggests seeing God behind everything that happens in the world. God is active in the work of salvation at every moment, and the function of *διάκρισις* is to discern God's saving will beyond events.

For a spiritual guide discernment means recognizing the spiritual needs of each individual, and giving him the correct spiritual treatment (e.g. 4.112 = 4.113 = 721D-724B). In this meaning, the whole of the *Scala* is penetrated by the theme of discernment. On every occasion Climacus recommends to find out what lies behind a particular vice, or what is the correct spiritual treatment that should

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Chrysostom. *De Sacer.* 2.4: 'the pastor has need of much discretion and of myriad eyes to observe on every side the habit of the soul'.

<sup>2</sup> An allusion to Mt 6.22, which Cassian also uses in his examination of discernment (*Conl.* I.II.5).

be given, depending on personal characteristics and circumstances. Discernment implies that there should be no standard approach to people, that every individual requires a special method of approach. A discerning guide 'should examine the case of each man and prescribe medicines which are suitable' (*Ad Past.* 32 = 1181CD), but he should also realize that 'God accepts and values the offerings of each according to their intention and power' (20.2 = 19.1 = 940D). In the spiritual life, there are no ready-made answers to particular questions or needs. Climacus writes: '... passions have many and various causes. That is why it is impossible to prescribe one identical rule for them. Instead, I would suggest that each of those who are sick should most carefully seek out his own particular cure. The first step in the cure should be a diagnosis of the cause of each disease; for when this is discovered, the patients will get the right cure from God's care and from their spiritual physicians' (8.28 = 8.30 = 833CD). 'Sometimes what serves as a medicine for one is poison for another; and sometimes something given to one and the same person at a suitable time serves as a medicine, but at the wrong time it is a poison'<sup>1</sup> (26.25 = 26.20 = 1020B). In this sense discernment is something proper to the stage in spiritual progress, which corresponds to being a guide rather than to someone under obedience, and in this case it is mainly the prerogative of a guide to apply the concept of discernment.

Climacus lists different levels of δῖακρισις: 'Discernment in beginners is true knowledge of themselves; in intermediate souls, it is a spiritual sense that faultlessly distinguishes what is truly good from what is of nature and opposed to it; and in the perfect it is the knowledge which they have within by Divine illumination, and which can enlighten with its lamp what is dark in others. Or

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 2.33.

perhaps, generally speaking, discernment is, and is recognized as, the assured understanding of the divine will on all occasions, in every place and in all matters' (26.1 = 26.1 = 1013A). Climacus strongly believes that one can (and should - see 26.91 = 26.63 = 1033A) always find a way of cognition of the Divine will and following it. Living under obedience, to live in accordance with the will of the abbot means to live according to the Divine will (4.26 = 4.23 = 692B), which is why Climacus calls obedience 'an abandonment of discernment in a wealth of discernment' (4.3 = 4.4 = 680A).

The cognition of the divine will is one of the most important issues in Climacus' theology. In the beginning of the spiritual ascent submission of will to God is carried out by submitting it to a spiritual guide. However, in the autonomous life the coordination of the human will with the Divine will is more complicated, and Climacus is aware of the delicacy of this matter (26.110 = 26-2.1 = 1057A). According to Climacus, if the demons fail to prevent us from doing good, they try to secure that this good should not be done according to the will of God (26.7 = 26.6 = 1013C). Thus, 'monks long not only for the good and Divine will, but also for the knowledge of what is not purely God's will' (26.110 = 26-2.1 = 1056D). The Divine will can be made clear either through others, both from elders and fellow-brothers, 'for God is not unjust, and will not lead astray souls who with faith and innocence humbly submit to the advice of their neighbour' (26.111 = 26-2.1057B). It can also be made known without intermediaries, by stripping the mind of its own intentions and offering God a petition in prayer, 'either through the noetic Mind noetically communicating with their mind, or through the complete disappearance from their soul of their cherished intention' (26.113 = 26.2-3 = 1057D). Some have known the Divine

will on account of temptations, accompanying their initiative, or through its unexpected success (26.114-115 = 26-2.3 = 1057D-1060A), but the ultimate condition in all cases is the obliteration of their own will (26.111 = 26-2.1057B).

Thus, a man who has attained to advanced stages of life in God is capable of cognition of the Divine will directly, without intermediaries. Someone who 'has obtained God through illumination' is assured of God's will instantly (26.116 = 26-2.4 = 1060A).

'The man of humble mind always loathes his own will as erring, and in his petitions to the Lord with unwavering faith, he learns what he should do, and he obeys. He ... casts his care upon God who used an ass to teach Balaam his duty' (25.54 = 25.49 = 1000BC).

'A man who has achieved the state of ἀπόθεια 'while still living in the flesh always has God dwelling within him as his Pilot (ἔχει κυβερνῶντα) in all his words, deeds and thoughts. Therefore, through illumination he apprehends the Lord's will as a sort of inner voice. He is above all human instruction' (29.11 = 29.15 = 1149C).

'Have God himself as your most excellent Pilot (κυβερνήτης), and as the Steward and Superior of all your inward and outward activities. Cutting your will through Him, you will be freed of all care and led by beckoning His will alone' (*Ad Past.* 50 = 1188A).

'A soul, which has united itself to God through purity, shall stand in need of no word of instruction, since this blessed one bears the everlasting Word within herself as her Initiator (μυσταγωγός), Guide, and Illumination' (*Ad Past.* 100 = 1201C).

These passages are very important for understanding Climacus' view of spiritual guidance. The terminology coincides: while a guide is a κυβερνήτης for a disciple, God is a κυβερνήτης to a guide. As has been said, Climacus sees Moses principally not as much a lawgiver, but as a contemplator of God. Moses is first of all the recipient of the 'Divine voice and illumination', a true guide, who has achieved perfection, beholds 'that light which is far more venerable, brilliant and sublime than the flame in the bush' (*Ad Past.* 100 = 1204C). Thus, Climacus uses the image of Moses to show that genuine guidance can only exist on condition of the immediacy of communion with God on the part of a guide, and it is the fullness of this communion which is the purpose of the initial *ascesis*:

'A genuine teacher is he who has received from God the tablet of spiritual knowledge, inscribed by His Divine finger, that is, by the in-working of illumination, and who has no need of other books. It is as unseemly for teachers to give instruction from notes taken from other men's writings, as it is for painters to take inspiration from other men's compositions' (*Ad Past.* 5 = 1165BC)

How original is Climacus in his emphasis on the cognition of the Divine will and following it? Origen and Gregory of Nyssa in their commentaries on the Lord's Prayer give no specific method of its cognition. Mark the Monk believes that 'grace may be hidden in advice given by a neighbour' (*Justif.* 56). He also thinks that God's will may be known indirectly, through the course of events: 'When something accords with God's will, all creation aids it. But when God rejects it, creation too opposes it' (*Ibid.* 183). An illustration to Mark's thesis may be found in the *Apophthegmata* (*Alph.* Isaac, Priest of the Cells 1).

Barsanuphius of Gaza gives advice, which is more precise: when one is not able to consult his *abba*, he should pray to God thrice on this matter, and, if the inclination of the soul changes even ‘καὶν ἕως τριχός’, this is what is to be done (*Corr.* 365, cf. 366). If even after the third prayer a man does not receive certainty in his soul, it is only his own sin which is an obstacle (*Ibid.* 367). On the other hand, if he has doubt ‘καὶν ἕως τριχός’ in his inclination even after calling upon God’s name, the initiative is a temptation, for ‘nothing done with confusion is pleasing to God’ (*Ibid.* 474, cf. 407, 408).

How faithful is Climacus to his predecessors in his understanding of discernment in general? Although the importance of discernment is stressed in many ascetic writings belonging to the period prior to Climacus, none of them give an exhaustive definition of the term.

In this respect the *Apophthegmata* is not an exception – although the theme of discernment comes out in various contexts, it is not clearly defined – G. Gould believed it to be simply ‘knowing how to act for the best in any particular situation’<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes discernment means wisdom and kindness in relation to pupils, finding the necessary balance for oneself and the others depending on the individual capacity of each: the best example is a parable about a bow and arrows, where Anthony says: ‘If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs’ (*Alph.* Anthony 13). Another meaning of discernment is following: ‘Everything that goes from excess comes from the demons’ (*Alph.* Poemen 129). This is one of the *Apophthegmata*’s central themes, but this excess is denounced not only regarding pleasures, but also to extreme forms of asceticism, including fasting

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<sup>1</sup> *Fathers.* p. 46. For discernment in the *Apophthegmata* see *Ibid.* pp. 44-52.

etc<sup>1</sup>. Climacus is certainly an heir to this outlook: 'To admire the labours of the saints is good; to emulate them wins salvation; but to wish suddenly to imitate their life in every point is unreasonable and impossible' (4.42 = 4.34 = 704C). It is interesting that Climacus attacks Evagrius' recommendation to confine one's stomach to bread and water (*Praktikos* 16) because he sees this instruction as an exhortation to 'climb up the whole ladder in a single stride' (14.12 = 14.8 = 865AB)

However, as Climacus himself indicates familiarity with Cassian's discourse on discernment (4.105 = 4.105 = 717B), it is likely that it was by him that Climacus was influenced most in this respect. As B. Ramsey notes, 'the entire *Conferences* of Cassian provide a model for the exercise of discernment'<sup>2</sup>.

For Cassian discernment is a gift of God (*Conl.* II.I.4), 'the begetter, guardian and moderator of all virtues' (*Ibid.* II.IV.4.), their 'source and root' (*Ibid.* 2.IX.1), without which no virtue can be attained or endured (II.IV.4). According to Abba Moses, Anthony saw it as the most important virtue (*Ibid.* II.II.3-4.). One of the most important meanings of discernment is the proper measure in asceticism (*Ibid.* II.V.1-VI.3, II.XVI.1-II.XXXVI.3). Cassian develops the tradition of the *Apophthegmata* by stating that discernment 'avoids excess of any kind and teaches the monk always to proceed along the royal road and does not let him be inflated by virtues on the right hand – that is, in an excess of fervour to exceed the measure of a justifiable moderation by a foolish presumption - nor let wander off to the vices on the left hand because of a reason for weakness for pleasure' (*Ibid.* II.II.4). One can only learn what discernment is through guidance and the example of forebears; 'the first proof of this humility

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<sup>1</sup> *Alph.* Arsenius 22,24, Ammonas 4, Gelasius 6, Poemen 31. Cf. *Sbo.* 64, *Am. Letter.* 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Introduction to Conferences.* p. 77.



will be if not only everything that is to be done but also everything that is thought of is offered to the inspection of the elders, so that, not trusting in one's own judgement, one may submit in every respect to their understanding and may know how to judge what is good and what is bad according to what they have handed down' (*Ibid.* II.X.1). We shall discuss the theme of revelation of λογισμοί shortly.

Most ancient monastic authors dedicate some of their attention to discernment, and it is outside of the scope of the present work to observe all its appearances in their writings. However, we can be confident in saying that although Climacus has clearly inherited the outlook of the desert, he is somewhat original in stressing the necessity of the cognition of the divine will and linking it with διάκρισις.

The picture of spiritual guidance in John Climacus would not be full without the concepts of διόρασις (insight, seeing through) – a qualification of a guide, superior to διάκρισις, and, προόρασις (foresight), in its turn, following διόρασις. (4.105 = 4.105 = 717B). While προόρασις signifies specifically the ability to foresee the future – a capacity, mentioned only once (*Ad Past.* 21 = 1177A).

The meaning of διόρασις is more difficult to define. I. Hausherr defines it as 'seeing through the screens that stop the gaze of the common mortal, some type of psychic radioscopy.'<sup>1</sup> According to Climacus, 'He who is perfectly purified sees the soul of his neighbour (although not the actual substance of the soul), and can tell its state. But he who progresses further can judge the state of

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<sup>1</sup> *Direction.* pp. 91-92.

the soul from the body'<sup>1</sup> (26.96 = 26.68 = 1033BC). Probably the case of a guide capable of seeing the sins of those who come to him for confession, can also be qualified as an expression of διόρασις, although the word Climacus uses on this occasion is πρόγνωσις (*Ad Past.* 84 = 1196B).

It is not clear whether Climacus' description of an abbot, who was given assurance of the amendment of every penitent monk in a prison for penitent monks, although it was about a mile away from the monastery, is an example of προόρασις rather than διόρασις; we can't be sure how consistent Climacus was in distinguishing the two (4.41 = 4.33 = 704B). In any case, he says we should not specifically seek a foresighted and clairvoyant (προγνώστας, μηδὲ προβλέπτας) guide (4.120 = 4.124 = 725D). Climacus also warns that the cases of foreknowledge in dreams (3.28 = 3.49 = 669D-672A), as well as 'reading thoughts' (22.18 = 21.16 = 952B, 24.27 = 24.9 = 984B), may be inspired by demons.

### *The meaning of confession*

In the relationship between a guide and a disciple Climacus attaches a crucial role to confession<sup>2</sup>. He suggests that it should be done in a prostrate position (4.66 = 4.58 = 709B) and accompanied by tears (4.63 = 4.56 = 709A). The carnal acts should not be confessed in detail (28.58 = 28.57 = 1140A, *Ad Past.* 61 = 1189D), for some people may find enjoyment even in confessing sins of flesh (15.86 = 15.81 = 901C), but all other sins are to be confessed in full (*Ad*

<sup>1</sup> Paul the Simple was said to have 'the grace from the Lord of seeing the state of each one's soul, just as we see their faces' (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Paul the Simple 1). Cf. Cyril of Skythopolis. *Vita Euthymii* 29. 45-47: 'From seeing the movements of the body he beheld the movements of the soul'. See also *Historia Monachorum* VIII.52, XII.10, 16.1, *Alph.* Joseph of Panephysis 1, *Am. Letter.* 16-17. See Hausherr. *Direction.* pp. 91-96.

<sup>2</sup> Apparently, Climacus uses the words ἐξομολόγησις and ἐξαγόρευσις interchangeably, e.g. in 4.12 = 4.15 = 684D, 7.2 = 7.3-4 = 801D and 23.38-40 = 23.1-3 = 976BD

*Past.* 61 = 1189D)<sup>1</sup>. Climacus also speaks about confessing one's sins to a superior before entering a community (4.74 = 4.70 = 712B, *Ad Past.* 45 = 1185B)<sup>2</sup>, and colourfully describes the public confession of a thief, who wished to enter the monastery (4.11 = 4.14 = 681B-684B). However, he describes this event as extraordinary, and his insistence on being ready to make a public confession at the discretion of a guide (4.10 = 4.13 = 681B) is most probably a pedagogic tool. Otherwise, Climacus calls to make confession only to one's guide (4.10 = 4.13 = 681B).

On two occasions John is more explicit in describing confessions:

'The brother who was the steward of the monastery confided this to me: 'When I was young,' he said, 'and was looking after cattle, I once had a very serious spiritual fall. But as it was never my habit to hide a snake in a hole in my heart, I caught it by the tail (and by the tail I mean the end of the business) and at once showed it to a physician. But with a smiling face, he struck me lightly by the jaw, and said to me: "Go, child, and continue your work as before, without being afraid in the least." And accepting this with flaming faith, in the course of a few days I received the assurance of my healing, and continued my way with both joy and fear.' (4.32 = 4.27 = 697A).

Another account is in John's discourse on unmentionable blasphemous thoughts: 'One zealous monk, who was troubled by this demon wore out his flesh for twenty years by fasts and vigils. But as he felt no benefit, he wrote his temptation on a tablet and bowed his face to the earth, not daring to look up. As soon as the elder had looked at it he smiled and, raising the brother, he said to

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<sup>1</sup> Note a contrast with Mark the Monk, who does not recommend confession in detail: 'To recall past sins in detail inflicts injury on the man who hopes in God. For when such recollection brings remorse it deprives him of hope; but if he pictures the sins to himself without remorse, they pollute him with the old defilement' (*Justif.* 139, see also 140).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Basil the Great. *Serm. De Renunt. Saec.* PG 31. 625C, *Reg. Fus. Tract.* 10.

him: 'Lay your hand on my neck, son.' And when the brother had done that, the great man said: 'On my neck, brother, be this sin, for as many years as it has acted or shall act in you; only after this, ignore it.' And this monk assured me that even before he had left the elder's cell, his infirmity has gone.' (23.52 = 23.14 = 980AB).

It may be said that in his understanding of repentance John Climacus is an heir to the *Apophthegmata*: 'At the moment when a man goes astray, if he says, I have sinned, immediately the sin ceases' (*Alph. Poemen* 99). For Climacus the spiritual life is a constant exercise of will in virtue and in denying sin – with successes and failures, but with determination in ascent to God (4.31 = 4.27 = 696D, 5.30 = 5.12 = 777D). One of the meanings of confession is that a sin no longer remains an intrinsic part of one's being, thus destroying personality. Through confession the self-isolation of a sinner is destroyed, 'he no longer wilfully shuts up inside himself, but powerless and hopeful he surrenders to the truth about himself'<sup>1</sup>. 'Powerless' and 'hopeful' are equally important characteristics of the experience of repentance – simply accepting one's helplessness would lead to despair, while μετάνοια as a change of mind suggests a turn to God, an expression of hope, which is the basic Christian virtue. Climacus has clearly inherited from the desert tradition the understanding of despair as the most dangerous condition (14.36 = 14.31 = 869D), believing that 'he who despairs is committing suicide' (5.38 = 5.23 = 720B), that 'a despairing man cannot be saved' (26.s50 = 26-3.41 = 1089A) and that ultimately death (ἀπώλεια) is not committing a sin in itself, but, rather, despair of oneself, following the act of sin (26.11 = 26.9 = 1016A).

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<sup>1</sup> Dörries. *Confession*. p. 289.

Usually Climacus speaks about confession in terms of repentance (4.12 = 4.15 = 684D, 4.53 = 4.46 = 705C, 4.62-63 = 4.55-56 = 708D, 4.66-67 = 4.58-59 = 709B, 15.48 = 15.44 = 889B, 15.86 = 15.81 = 901C, *Ad Past.* 83 = 1196B), rather than in terms of disclosure of thoughts. From his discourse on ‘unmentionable blasphemous thoughts’ and the need to confess them, it follows that they are to be confessed as a sin rather than revealed as λογισμοί, in spite of the fact that one is not responsible for them, for ‘nothing gives the demons and bad thoughts such power over us as nourishing and hiding them in our heart unconfessed’. The main difficulty of these λογισμοί is precisely that they are so difficult ‘to put into words, to confess, or to expose to a spiritual physician’ (23.38 = 23.1 = 976B). Thus, when the ascetic struggle takes place mainly on the intellectual level, the border between penitential confession and revelation of thoughts becomes a fine one: ‘As hens’ eggs that are warmed out in dung hatch out, so thoughts that are not confessed hatch out and proceed to action’ (26.s21 = 26-3.12 = 1085C).

Climacus has only one clear allusion to revelation of thoughts as such: monks in a monastery he had visited are described to have written all their thoughts into a small book, always worn on the belt, and then submitting it to the superior for the inspection (4.39 = 4.32 = 701CD)<sup>1</sup>. This revelation of λογισμοί is a standard monastic procedure, which exponent is described, among others, by Basil the Great: a monk ‘ought not to conceal within himself any movement of his soul, nor yet utter any thoughtless word, but he should reveal the secrets of his heart to those of his brethren whose office it is to exercise a compassionate and sympathetic solicitude for the weak.’ (*Reg. Fus. Tract.* 26, cf.

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed analysis of this practice in the ascetic tradition see Hausherr. *Direction*. Ch.7.

15, 44). It certainly existed in the Pachomian *koinonia* (*Paral.* 27.), and the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John has several references to it (215, 320, 375, 577 etc). If we speak about confessing one's thoughts in general, this does not signify they are evil. 'What condemns us is not that thoughts enter into us but that we use them badly; indeed, through our thoughts we can be shipwrecked, and through our thoughts we can be crowned' (*Apophthegmata Anon.* 218).

The monastic experience of confessing λογισμοί may probably be summarized in a short extract from the *Apophthegmata*: 'A brother came to see Abba Poemen in the second week of Lent and told him about his thoughts; he obtained peace' (*Poemen* 58). The meaning of confessing λογισμοί is that, in the words of John Cassian, 'as soon as a wicked thought has been revealed it loses its power' (*Conl.* II.X.3.). On the other hand, 'The enemy rejoices over nothing so much as over those who do not manifest their thoughts' (*Alph. Poemen* 101).

The fact that the struggle takes place within oneself implies particular attention, given to λογισμοί and their discretion. According to Climacus (26.188 = 26-2.70 = 1076A) and his predecessors (Origen *De Princ.* 3.2.4, Evagrius *De Mal. Cog.* 7, John Cassian *Conl.* I.XIX.1, and Barsanuphius and John of Gaza *Corr.* 124) thoughts have three different sources, namely, God, devil, and oneself, and the function of διάκρισις is to find out the source. According to Climacus, this belongs only to the perfect. If a monk owing to his inexperience cannot identify sources of his λογισμοί, his spiritual father may do, as K. Ware puts it, by seeing in them the deeper meaning of which the disciple is unaware<sup>1</sup>.

One of the aspects of confessing λογισμοί is pedagogic: 'By resolving to make one's confession, the soul is therefore held from sinning as by a bridle. For

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<sup>1</sup> *Introduction.* p.38.

what we do not confess, that we do fearlessly as though in dark.’ (4.53 = 4.46 = 705C), and ‘those who are ashamed a physician cause their wounds to fester’ (*Ad Past.* 36 = 1184B)<sup>1</sup>.

However, evil λογισμοί are not only potential passions but are a sin by themselves, and their confession has not only a preventive and pedagogic significance, but also a therapeutic one. In the patristic tradition sin was understood not as a violation of a certain rule, but rather, as a mutilation of the soul’s beauty by an evil impulse. In the words of Mark the Monk, ‘If we want to do something but cannot, then before God, who knows our hearts, it is as we have done it. This is true whether the intended action is good or bad’ (*Justif.* 15). As Dörries remarks, ‘The decisive element consists in recognition of oneself, not in individual trespasses. To remain on the level of the latter is to miss the human being’s true situation’<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, there has not been a strong differentiation between a sin actually committed and its intention, as both are equally self-destructive.

There is yet another motif that can be traced in the writings of the fathers – that of trust of one’s confessor. In the *Reg. Brev. Tract.* 227 Basil writes that confession should be made ‘to those who are like-minded (τοῖς ὁμοψύχοις) and have given proof of both faith and understanding’. It is possible that Basil express the same idea as the *Apophthegmata*: ‘Do not lay open your conscience to anyone you do not trust in your heart’ (*Alph. Poemen* 201) This expression is similar to that of Mark the Monk: advising Nicholas the Solitary to reveal his thoughts to others, he says they must be ‘of the same mind’ (ὁμοφρόνων καὶ

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Chrysostom. *De Sacer.* 2,2 – 2,3.

<sup>2</sup> *Confession.* p. 286.

συμψυχῶν) (*Nic.* V. 18). John of Gaza says that thoughts are to be revealed only to someone 'whom you trust as God' (*Corr.* 361).

A modern reader of the *Scala* may ask: is Climacus speaking about the sacrament of confession, as we understand it now, or does he mean simply a confession to a monastic elder, who did not need to be a priest? Most likely, Climacus did not distinguish clearly between the two. Stating a question in this way would be anachronistic – we are tempted to look at ancient authors in modern terms, which they did not operate with. There is no evidence anywhere in the *Scala* of sacramental confession, which does not contradict the claim of Smirnov that before the eighth century private confession, which existed only in the monasteries, was sacramental neither in its origins nor in its practice<sup>1</sup>. However, after such confession a monk usually did not seek for sacramental confession and ecclesiastical penance<sup>2</sup>. According to Barringer, 'Unordained monks certainly acted as spiritual guides and directors of conscience for the laity before 692, and heads of monasteries, whether ordained or unordained, certainly granted pardon for sins and offences committed within monastic brotherhoods'<sup>3</sup>. He has also pointed out that 'even in cases where the unordained confessor is said to have forgiven the sinners who came to him, closer examination of the text and context has revealed that the nature of this 'forgiveness' must be distinguished from the ecclesiastical absolution'<sup>4</sup>. The key elements in such confession were the confessor's power of intercession (παρησία)<sup>5</sup> and his personal experience of God's all-merciful nature. The actual forgiveness was

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<sup>1</sup> *Omeu*, pp. 117, 200

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. XIX.

<sup>3</sup> R. Barringer. *Ecclesiastical Penance in the Church of Constantinople*. D.Phil thesis. Oxford, 1979. p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> See Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 616, 706.



secured from God by sincere repentance of the sinner himself<sup>1</sup>. In this respect the particularly important notion is that of *πένθος*, which Smirnov labelled as 'penance without confession'<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, forgiveness of sins for Climacus, as well as for the ancient monastic tradition, is not understood in later scholastic terminology of absolution, but in terms of the soul being cleansed through one's one effort of repentance and through God's grace, which makes repentance possible and sanctifies man. We have evidence that by the eleventh century the matter was not at all settled. According to Symeon the New Theologian, ordination itself is not sufficient for performing the sacrament of confession. At the same time, those who are not ordained, but have personal sanctity, can exercise this ministry<sup>3</sup>. The curious fact is not that Symeon held such an opinion, but, as has been pointed out, that he was never condemned for this view, in spite of having had difficulties with ecclesiastical hierarchy on other matters<sup>4</sup>. If we look at the earlier tradition, there is no straightforward solution to this problem. We can see that Basil (see above) does not see it as necessary to make such confession to the superior. Moreover, there is no indication that the brothers in office were priests, on the opposite; the designation "brothers" signifies they were not. Barsanuphius saw himself in a position to write to a brother: 'Your sins are forgiven' (*Corr.* 218, cf. 107, 115, 220, 226, 220, 569), although there is no indication that he was a priest. In the words of the same father, 'When one exposes his transgressions, he is justified' (*Ibid.* 399)

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<sup>1</sup> Barringer. *Penance*. pp. 200-201. The public confession of a sinner in *Scala* 4.11 = 4.14 = 681B-684B hardly has sacramental overtones, although, according to Climacus, 'he did not rise from the floor until he was granted remission for all his sins' (4.12 = 4.15 = 684D).

<sup>2</sup> *Omeu*. p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> See Ware. *Father*. pp. 307-309 and Alfeyev. *Symeon*. Ch. 8.2.

<sup>4</sup> *The ascetic works of Saint Basil*. Translated into English with introduction and notes by W.K.L. Clarke. London, SPCK; New York, Macmillan Co., 1925.p. 51 and Ware. *Father*. pp. 308-309.

The sacraments of the Church were not seen as having mechanical effect, but as *synergia* of God and man. In any case, in the early East there has never been a clear definition of what is a sacrament, and what is not – this outlook came to be inherited from the scholastic tradition long afterwards. Thus, Climacus certainly did not think in terms of seven sacraments of the Church. It is therefore not accidental that Climacus uses sacramental Eucharistic language, when speaking about guiding a soul: a true shepherd is he, who, being ‘a fellow labourer (συνεργός) of the bodiless and spiritual powers’ (an allusion to the Sanctus?), ‘from things defiled offers unblemished gifts to God’ (*Ad Past.* 78 = 1193CD). The abbot of the monastery Climacus had visited is said to have ‘directed, led to perfection and offered to Christ unblemished lambs (PG: sacrifices)’ (4.28 = 4.24 = 693C). Climacus insists: ‘We can offer no gift to God so acceptable as to bring Him rational souls’ (*Ad Past.* 90 = 1197C). Thus, for Climacus spiritual guidance by itself was a sacrament, which surpasses ‘every ἐργασία and θεωρία of both men and angels’ (*Ad Past.* 77 = 1193C).

Finally, we may ask a question: was the spiritual father an abbot? Most likely the abbot of the monastery described in Ch. 4, being a priest<sup>1</sup>, was a spiritual father of the entire community. Elsewhere it seems that Climacus suggests that there can be a variety of spiritual fathers in a single community, the abbot not being the only one. Climacus describes a disciple (μαθητής) of Menas, mentioning that Menas occupied the second place after the superior (4.34 = 4.29 = 697B-700A). When Climacus criticizes priests, giving a blessing to young people ‘to use wine and all the rest’ he emphasizes that the mistake is not in the act of such blessing, but in the fact that these young people are not under their

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<sup>1</sup> This is implied in 4.11 = 4.14 = 681B-684B suggesting his celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.

direction (μὴ ὑποκειμένους) (14.11 = 14.7 = 865A). Climacus implies that when one lives in ἡσυχία his guide is not the abbot, as a monk can always see his father, while those in the community cannot (4.76 = 4.72 = 712C). Perhaps that Climacus speaks about a guide living out of a monastery, like Climacus himself did for a long time (according to the *Vita*), and, consequently, he is not an abbot. Thus, in this respect Climacus is not entirely definitive and leaves space for speculation.

### ***Conclusion***

The foundation of Climacus' view of spiritual guidance and his uncompromising austerity in all aspects of spiritual direction is the value of human being in God's eyes. 'The whole world is not worth so much as a soul, because the one passes away while the other is imperishable and abides' (*Ad Past.* 90 = 1196D) The Fathers were also well aware that at no moment of its existence can the soul remain neutral to good or evil. It is precisely this value of the human soul, which Climacus and his predecessors saw as justifying the austerities of monastic obedience.

Together with the more apparent monastic austerity in the questions of obedience and spiritual life, Climacus had also inherited from the monastic tradition an attitude to discipleship, characterized by attachment between a guide and his disciple. 'Listen, O monk, to the words of your father, and do not make his admonitions something powerless in you. Whenever he sends you, take him along; and travel with him in thinking.' (Evagrius *Ad Mon.* 73) This attachment is mutual: 'Did you not hear from me, that wherever you go and whatever you do according to God, my heart is always following you?' asks Barsanuphius of Gaza

his disciple (*Corr.* 28). Discipleship forms a mutual bond, which extends from the present into the world to come. Thus, a teacher and a pupil cannot be saved without one another (*Ibid.* 187).

Both the guide and an apprentice are following the *kenosis* of Christ: the first through the sacrificial self-emptying love, the second by submitting his will to his shepherd, and, through him, to the Good Shepherd of the Gospel, who lays down His life for His sheep (Jn. 10.11). Being the 'art of arts'<sup>1</sup>, spiritual direction requires gentleness and firmness on behalf of a guide, and, above all, his own spiritual integrity. After all, the commandment of the desert to a guide in relation to his subordinates was 'Be their example, not their legislator' (*Apophthegmata Alph. Poemen* 174).

It has been suggested that *Ad Pastorem* has been influenced by the treatise *Regulae Pastoralis* by Gregory the Great<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, some themes appear in both treatises. For example, both authors emphasise the danger for a shepherd to commit sin in thought (*Reg. Past.* I.4/*Ad Past* 60), they insist that a shepherd needs to have 'familiar acquaintance' (*familiaritatis*) with God, so that he has necessary force of prayer (*Reg. Past.* I.10/*Ad Past.* 15 = 1172D), finding the right balance between gentleness and severity (*Reg. Past.* II.6/*Ad. Past* 32-33 = 1181C-1184A), being humble and firm at the same time (*Reg. Past* II.4/*Ad. Past.* 38-40 = 1184BC). Both writers condemn those, who, possessing necessary gifts, flee from accepting the roles of guides and shepherds (*Reg. Past.* I.5,6/*Ad. Past.* 59 = 1189C). The leitmotifs of teaching by life and not simply by words, as well as the principle of discernment, are also shared by the two writers. Moreover, the

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Nazanzus *Or.* 2.16, Nilus of Ancyra. *Liber de Monastica Exercitatione.* 749B, Gregory the Great. *Reg. Past.* I.1.

<sup>2</sup> T. Spidlik. *John Climacus (or Scholasticus)*. In: *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*. Ed. by Angelo di Berardino. NY, Oxford University Press. 1992. Vol. 1. p. 442.

two particular notions of passions being disguised as virtues (*Reg. Past.* II.9) and a shepherd accepting infirmities upon himself (*Reg. Past.* II.5), appear elsewhere in the *Scala*<sup>1</sup>.

However, there are no direct indications of Climacus drawing directly from Gregory, as Climacus himself makes no references to Gregory's treatise, while referring to Cassian in a similar context on another. Moreover, while Climacus discussed the office of an abbot, Gregory was concerned with the episcopal office.

## **LOVE**

### ***Love as the essence of spiritual life***

As the most important theme in Christianity, the theme of love penetrates all patristic writings of all genres. Therefore, attempting to systematize it is an extremely difficult task; Nygren, the author of *Agape and Eros*, was the first author who dared to do so. Nygren's main thesis is that the Christian motif of *agape*/descending love was gradually ejected by the Classical *eros*/ascending love, *agape* later on to be revived by Luther. By introducing this distinction, he opposes the kenotic love of God for man to the platonic love of man for God. Climacus, together with numerous other Fathers, fell victim to Nygren's criticism, which we shall analyze later on. In his book *Christianity and Eros* P. Sherrard provides a far more balanced approach. Considering the role of *eros* in the Christian tradition, Sherrard criticises the early Christian tradition for reducing the meaning of marriage to procreation, and it is this reduction in his view which resulted in the failure to perceive any spiritual significance of marriage except for procreation as such. However, Sherrard does not find an

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 85 and p. 228.

answer to the question, implicitly present in our discussion on monk and married Christian, that is, why the attitude of the Early Church, in Sherrard's expression, 'differs little from that of dualists of a Manichean type.'<sup>1</sup> Why was it that the Old Testament view of marriage as the ultimate blessing from God was substituted with the ideal of virginity? Would it not be an oversimplification to explain this only by Christ's exhortation to be eunuchs for the Kingdom of heaven as well as by Paul's commendation of a single state (1 Cor. 7)? It is doubtful that only two scriptural passages could form most of the Early Church's understanding of marriage. After all, why would it be these two passages rather than the blessing in Cana and the Pauline vision of union between Christ and Church as a model for marriage be the cornerstone for the Christian vision of marriage?

However, Climacus is not interested in this discussion, which interests modern scholars. His sole purpose is to establish the significance of love as a purely monastic virtue. For Climacus love is a central theme; it constitutes the beginning and the end of the spiritual journey. 'Αγάπη as a virtue is a natural one (φυσικῇ), 'for even dumb animals often weep at the loss of one another' (26.67 = 26.41 = 1028A). However, it is also the summit of the spiritual life, to which Climacus dedicates the final chapter of his treatise. Although Climacus stresses the importance of πένθος, he states that ultimately 'God does not ask or desire that man should mourn from the sorrow of heart, but rather that out of love for Him he should rejoice with spiritual laughter' (7.45 = 7.46 = 809C). It is the need of the ultimate realization of the relationship between God and man as a personal and a loving one, which makes Climacus lay such a great stress on renunciation at all stages of one's spiritual life. The person who loves seeks to get rid of all the

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<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and Eros: Essays on the Theme of Sexual Love*. London: SPCK, 1976. p. 5.

obstacles which separate him from the beloved, in order to achieve a complete union. Dedicating the beginning of the *Scala* to renunciation (ἀποταγή), detachment (ἀπροσπαθεία) and exile (ξενιτεία), which constitute the essence of monasticism, Climacus makes clear that it is love for God which is the driving force of monastic life: ‘The man who really loves the Lord, who has made a real effort to find the future Kingdom, who is really pained by his sins, who is really mindful of eternal torment and judgment, who really lives in fear of his own departure, will not love, care or worry about ... anything at all on earth ... stripped ... of everything, he will follow Christ without anxiety or hesitation, always looking heavenward and expecting help from there, to the according to the word of the holy man: “My soul sticks close before Thee” (Ps. 62.9), and according to the ever-memorable author who said: “I have not wearied of following thee, not have I desired the day (or rest) of man, O Lord” (Jer. 17. 16)’ (2.1 = 2.1 = 653BC).

If communion with God is of the ultimate value, than for a monk nothing else is of importance, and this is why the language of death is so frequently employed in the monastic literature. This idea is expressed in a more simple way in the *Apophthegmata*: ‘If a man does not say in his heart, in the world there is only myself and God, he will not gain peace’ (*Alph. Alonius* 1)<sup>1</sup>. This may seem an obliteration of the commandment to love one’s neighbour rather than its fulfilment. Why is it only ‘myself and God’? After all, how is it possible for a solitary monk to fulfil the commandment of loving his neighbours? Climacus does not articulate an answer. We may find an answer in Climacus’ contemporary, Isaac the Syrian, who wrote: ‘the commandment that says ‘You

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<sup>1</sup> Same in Barsanuphius of Gaza *Corr.* 346.

shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind', more than the world, nature, and all that pertains thereto, is fulfilled when you patiently endure in your stillness. And the commandment that speaks of the love of neighbour is included within the former. Do you wish to acquire in your soul the love of neighbour according to the Gospel? Separate yourself from him, and then the heat and flame of him will burn in you and you will rejoice over the sight of his countenance as though you beheld an angel of light'. (*Hom.* 44).

Christ said: 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me' (Mt. 10.37). The monastic tradition understood this quite literally. Monastic writings contain numerous narratives, describing monks who refused to see even their own mothers (e.g. *Apophthegmata Alph.* Mark, Disciple of Abba Silvanus 4, *Poemen* 76). According to Climacus, the love of God breaks the bond of love to one's family in the outset of monastic life: 'Longing for God (πόθος Θεοῦ) extinguishes longing for our parents. And so anyone who says he has both is deceiving himself ... For strife and separation delight the Lord when they spring from love for Himself' (3.16 = 3.21-22 = 668A). In fact, what a monk may think to be love of parents turns out to be a demonic temptation (2.10 = 2.16 = 657B, 3.27 = 3.38 = 669C).

In Climacus there is a link between love and dispassion. While the chapter on love follows the chapter on dispassion, Climacus also says that the two are in fact the same, differing only by name (30.9 = 30.4 = 1156B). Evagrius, too, called ἀγάπη 'the goal of πρακτική' (*Pract.* 84) and a 'progeny of ἀπάθεια' (*Ibid.* 81). For Cassian the meaning of *puritas cordis* is ἀπάθεια.



Dedicating his first *Conference* to the ‘*scopos* of the monk’, which is *puritas cordis*, Cassian makes clear that *puritas cordis* is nothing else but love (*Conl.* I.VII.2). Both Climacus and Maximus the Confessor follow Evagrius closely in this respect. While the concept of ἀπάθεια hardly stood in need of justification as a Christian one, nevertheless, the association of love with dispassion emphasises the Christian meaning of the latter. Moreover, in connection with dispassion the state of loving is understood not only as an emotion, but as a result of ascetic labour, resulting in a soul capable of love.

Of the earlier fathers, Cassian was probably the most explicit on the subject of love. He affirms that love of God is not compatible with attachment to anything else in the world (*Ibid.* I.VI): ‘This should be our principal effort, then; this should be constantly pursued as the fixed goal of our heart, so that our mind may always be attached to divine things and to God. Whatever is different from this, however great it may be, is nevertheless to be judged as secondary or even as base, and indeed as harmful’ (*Ibid.* I.VIII.1). All other virtues are simply a means of achieving love of God (*Ibid.* I.X). The importance of love is explained by the fact that ‘all the gifts that are given for use and necessity are temporal and they will certainly pass on as soon as the present age has been consummated, but love will never be taken away. For not only in the present world does it operate effectively in us but also on the time to come it will, once the burden of fleshly necessity has been laid down, abide and be still more effective and excellent; it will never be corrupted by any defect but will cling to God more ardently and intently because of its perpetual incorruption’ (*Ibid.* I.XI.1). If the desired end of the monastic life is the kingdom of God (*Ibid.* I.IV.3), love acts as a bridge, ‘which holds the promise of the present life and of that one that is to come’; it

makes the substance of the future life present now. Thus, it is the precisely the everlasting nature of love that makes the relationship with God a never-ending progress both in this life and in the life to come (*Ibid.* I.XI.2). We hear the same motif in Climacus' definition of love as 'progress of eternity' (προκοπή τῶν αἰώνων) (30.35 = 30.18 = 1160B). His understanding of ἐπέκτασις, which we have already discussed, is based entirely on understanding the love of God as a never-ending journey. 'End of love will be truly endless' (26.153 = 26-2.38 = 1068B) and thus love joins together this age and the age to come. Again, Climacus is not alone. According to Theodoretus of Cyrus, 'the more a man devotes himself to the things of God, the more does he kindle the fire of love' (*Historia Religiosa epil.* 5), while Macarius of Egypt describes affection for God as 'insatiable affection and an inclination which is never filled (ἀκόρεστός στοργή καὶ ἄπληστος διάθεσις)' (*Coll. H* 25.3).

Climacus reminds his readers a few times that God is love (24.23 = 24.16 = 984A, 30.1 = 30.1 = 1156A, 30.6 = 30.2 = 1156A, summary/1161A, *Ad Past.* 100 = 1208A), and that love is 'resemblance to God' (ὁμοίωσις Θεοῦ) (30.7 = 30.3 = 1156B) (30.4). Thus, he implicitly brings in the notion of θέωσις: it is love that makes one God-like. In monastic literature the language of θέωσις may not always be present explicitly, but is certainly present implicitly. For example, Mark the Monk writes that we are to obtain the same degree of love as God has to the world, and the sign of this love is to forgive wrongs done to us (*Justif.* 48). A similar idea can be found in the *Apophthegmata*: 'They said of Abba Macarius the Great that he became, as it is written, a god upon earth, because, just as God protects the world, so Abba Macarius would cover the faults which he saw, as though he did not see them; and those which he heard, as though he did not hear

them' (*Alph.* Macarius the Great 32). Because God is love, achieving His likeness means growth in love. If the purpose of the journey is union with God, then the way of achieving similitude with God is a laborious way of self-reconstruction.

### ***Fear and love***

There is a dialectic of fear and love in *Scala*: 'The growth of fear is the beginning of love' (30.20 = 30.12 = 1157C), while 'as love wanes, fear appears' (30.10 = 30.4 = 1156B). This principle is applied in various contexts, and the motif of juxtaposing fear and love recurs a few times in the *Scala*. Initially Climacus accepts three motifs for enrolling into the monastic life, discarding all others: 'for the sake of the future kingdom, or because of the multitude of their sins, or for love of God' (1.5 = 1.12 = 633C, cf. *Ad Past.* 34 = 1184A). He then goes on to accept only one motif as worthy: 'The man who renounces the world from fear is like burning incense, that begins with fragrance but ends in smoke. He who leaves the world through hope of reward is like a millstone, that always moves in the same way. But he who withdraws from the world out of love for God has obtained fire set to fuel, it soon kindles a larger fire' (1.13 = 1.24 = 637A). Climacus contrasts fear and love elsewhere: 'Just as the fathers lay down that perfect love is free from falls, so I for my part declare that a perfect sense of death is free from fear' (6.14 = 6.16 = 796B). Speaking about those who transposed their *eros* into the spiritual realm, Climacus writes: 'overcoming all fear ... they spurred themselves insatiably on to the love of God' (5.26 = 5.6 = 777A). He distinguishes tears from fear and tears from love: 'Tears shed from fear intercede for us; but tears of all-holy love show us that our prayer has been accepted' (7.7 = 7.9 = 804B). 'Tears over our departure produce fear. But when

fear gives birth to fearlessness, joy dawns. But when constant joy is obtained, holy love bursts into flower.’ (7.56 = 7.54 = 813BC). However, Climacus makes clear that tears produced by love which has not attained perfection are more easily stolen away, and thus tears from fear in their due time may be safer (7.66 = 7.67 = 816B). ‘He who has come to know himself has obtained an understanding of the fear of the Lord; and he who has walked by the aid of this fear, has reached the door of love’ (25.29 = 25.28 = 996A). A significant exception to Climacus’ usual fear-love correlation may be found in the discourse on ἡσυχία, which corresponds to the higher degrees of spiritual progress: ‘He who is chained up in prison fears the judge who sentences him, but the hermit in his cell begets fear of the Lord; and the tribunal is not so terrifying to the former as the throne of the Judge to the latter. You need great fear for stillness, excellent man, because nothing else is so effective in dispelling despondency’ (27.69 = 27.35 = 1113 BC). However, this passage may be an instruction on how to struggle with ἀκηδία rather than an attempt to place fear in regard to love. On the whole, the fear-love dynamic in Climacus is lucid.

Many other Fathers speak about progress from fear to love, usually referring to 1 Jn. 4.18<sup>1</sup>. As early as Origen may this notion may be found (*Comm. in Evang. Matt.* 13.26). The tradition ascribed to the great Anthony the words ‘I no longer fear God but I love Him’ (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Anthony 32), while Macarius of Egypt wrote: ‘Infants seek God being afraid of earthly danger, while those progressing are driven by desire (προκόψαντες τῷ πόθῳ κρατοῦνται), ‘for perfect love casts out fear’ (1 Jn. 4.18) (*Coll.* B 41.1.7). Gregory the Great writes: ‘truly no liberty of spirit possesses the soul of him who fears. For, were

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<sup>1</sup> A survey of some relevant passages may be found in Зарин. *Аскетизм*. pp. 168-177.

he not afraid of the punishment, he would doubtless commit the sin. The mind, therefore, that is bound by the bondage of fear knows not the grace of liberty. For good should be loved by itself, not pursued because of the compulsion of penalties' (*Reg. Past.* III.13). Maximus the Confessor associates fear and hope with  $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ , and love with  $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$  (*Cap. Carit.* II.6). Progress from fear to love is a constant theme in Isaac the Syrian (*Hom.* 3, 46, 51 and elsewhere).

The notion of the threefold scheme of fear, hope, and love, which Climacus makes use of, may also be found in earlier authors. Sometimes these three correspond to the states of slavery, employ and sonship. The earliest author, in whom this distinction may be found seems to be Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 7.12.73). Later on, it occurs in Basil the Great (*Reg. fus. Tract.*, proemium), who is later explicitly referred to by Dorotheos of Gaza (*Instr.* III.48). Likewise, Gregory of Nyssa completes *Vita Mosis* by stating: 'This is true perfection: not to avoid a wicked life because like slaves we servilely fear punishment, nor to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life be some business-like and contractual argument. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God's friendship as the only dreadful thing and we consider becoming God's friend the only thing worthy of honour and desire' (II.320). Concluding the *Life of Moses* on this note, he begins the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* with the juxtaposition of fear, love and hope (I. GNO 16). This threefold scheme also occurs in Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or.* 40.13). Thus, is not clear which Gregory Dorotheos refers to, when he speaks about fear, hope and love on a different occasion, referring to 'Gregory' when, once again, he

introduces the threefold scheme in his *Instructions* XIV.157<sup>1</sup>. The fear-hope-love scheme is especially elaborated by Cassian, who devotes most of his Conference 11 to the relation between them<sup>2</sup>. Identifying the three with the virtues of faith, hope and love (11.VI.2), Cassian represents them as three consecutive stages. As an illustration, he refers to the parable of the prodigal son, who progressed from the fear of hunger and slavery to the hope of reconciliation and becoming a hireling, before being accepted as a son (11.VII.2-3). Cassian makes the same point as Gregory the Great: those being driven by love are more stable in virtue than those motivated by fear or hope, because 'in the former the good is willed, whereas in the latter it is as it were coerced and violently forced out of someone who is unwilling, whether by fear of punishment or by desire for rewards. For the person who resists the blandishments of vice by reason of fear will return to what he loves when the obstacle of fear has been removed, and consequently he will not attain to constant steadfastness in good; on the contrary, he will never be free of attack, because he will not possess the firm and unceasing peace of purity. For where battles rage there cannot but be the danger of wounds as well' (11.VIII.3-4). However, Cassian also identifies a different kind of fear, which he calls 'the more sublime fear of love, which is begotten not by dread of punishment or by desire for reward, but by the greatness of one's love. It is with this anxious disposition that a son fears his very indulgent father or a brother his brother or a friend his friend or a wife her husband, inasmuch as they are afraid not of blows or insults but of the slightest offence against love' (11.XIII.1). Interpreting Is.

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<sup>1</sup> Some mss. read 'Basil', instead of 'Gregory', according to the editors of the SC text.

<sup>2</sup> See also *Inst.* IV. 39. On the progress from fear to love in Cassian see Michael Casey, OCSO. *The Journey from Fear to Love: John Cassian's Road Map*. In: *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*. Ed. by P. Allen, R. Canning and B.J.Caiger. Australian Catholic University. pp. 181-195.

11.2 'and a spirit of fear of the Lord will fill him', Cassian concludes that this is the fear which Christ also had, 'to offer a way of perfection and example of virtue' (11.XIII.8). Diadochus' position is more ambiguous, but is probably the same as that of Cassian: on the one hand, he says that both fear and love may be found 'in the righteous who achieve virtue through the ἐνέργεια of the Holy Spirit in them' (*Cap. Gnost.* 16). On the other hand, he affirms that 'in perfect love there is no fear' (*Ibid.* 17). Dorotheos clearly identifies two kinds of fear: the 'preliminary' and the 'perfect'. While the first is the fear of punishment, the second is the fear of a man, who has tasted the sweetness of being with God; he fears he may fall away from it; he fears to be turned away from it'. Dorotheos says about such people that 'no longer do they act from fear, but they fear out of love' (*Instr.* IV.48). Likewise, Maximus the Confessor distinguishes between the two kinds of the fear of God: one originates from fear of punishment, and is cast out by perfect love, while the second fear love has always joined with it (*Cap. Carit.* I. 81-82).

Climacus does not always specify whether he is speaking about fearing the future punishment or fearing God. It is clear, however, that for him the state of fear precedes the state of love. This is not to say, of course, that Climacus rejects fear or hope altogether. Elsewhere he emphasises the importance of both fear and hope: 'where the fear of Gehenna has appeared, there is patient endurance of every toil; but where the hope of the Kingdom is known, there is disdain for all earthly things.' (*Ad Past.* 34). The motif of fear also recurs constantly in the *Scala*: 'Let us fear the Lord not less than we fear beasts', (1.15 = 1.27 = 637

BC)<sup>1</sup>. Climacus exhorts his readers to acquire fear of hell in very visual terms: 'Do not cease to picture and scrutinize the dark abyss of eternal fire, and the merciless servants, the uncompassionate and inexorable Judge, the bottomless pit of subterranean flame, the narrow descents to the awful underground chambers and yawning gulfs, and all such things, so that the sensuality in our soul may be checked by great terror' (7.10 = 7.12 = 804C). On the whole, the fear of future punishment as a deterrent from sin is a commonplace in the patristic literature. Opposing the demonic provocations, Anthony the Great 'kept his thoughts upon the threat of fire and the pain of the worm' (*Vita Antonii* 5). Similar exhortations may be found in Evagrius (e.g. *Ad Eulog.* 23,24) Maximus the Confessor views fear of God and the future judgment as a foundation of νῆψις (*Lib. Ascet.* 18) and πένθος (*Ibid.* 27). Gregory of Nyssa does not deny the value of fear, but gives it only a pedagogic role: the message of the last judgment 'to the thoughtless sort is held out as the threat of a terrible correction, in order that through fear of this painful retribution they may gain the wisdom of fleeing from wickedness: while by those of more intelligence it is believed to be a remedial process ordered by God to bring back man, His peculiar creature, to the grace of his primal condition' (*Or. Cat.* 8). In this Gregory seems to be dependent on his understanding of virtue, which is, according to his definition, 'a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion: that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue' (*De Op. Hom.* 16.11). Gregory of Nyssa follows Origen's understanding of virtue, which he expounds in *De Princ.* 3.1, as well as in other works: 'God does not tyrannize but rules, and when he rules, he does not coerce but encourages, and he wishes that those under Him yield themselves willingly to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 4.113 = 4.114 = 724BC, 5.23 = 5.5 = 773C, 6.19 = 6.21 = 797B, 12.7 = 12.5 = 856B, 18.5 = 17.5 = 933B, 21.11 = 20.10 = 948A, 22.41 = 21.32 = 956C, 25.1 = 25.1 = 988B, 26.44 = 26.29 = 1024A, 26.51 = 26.31 = 1024B, 30.17 = 30.11 = 1157A.



His direction so that the good of someone may not be according to compulsion but according to his free will ... In sum, God seeks a way, in a manner of speaking, whereby one would want to do with free will what God wishes' (*Hom. in Jer.* 20.2). Thus, being driven by love is for Gregory is the only path which can be called free in the proper sense of the word.

Likewise, Gregory of Nyssa ascribes to hope a merely pedagogic role. Repeating after Origen (*Comm. Cant. Cant. Proem.* 3) that the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs correspond to the three consecutive ages of childhood, adolescence and maturity, Gregory says about the promises of reward for righteousness in the book of Proverbs that a child, 'in order that the infant may listen more willingly to his parents and be more careful in his lessons, ... is promised childish trinkets. Such trinkets are the gold chain shining around his neck and the crown entwined with pretty flowers' (*Comm. in Cant. Cant. I* = GNO VI. 18.9 – 19.2). In *In Inscript. Psalm.* II.II. he is less ironic, speaking about the crowns, which facilitate the labour of those, who pursue victory at the stadium of life (GNO V. 73. 2-6).

Thus, there is continuity between Climacus and earlier fathers: while fear and hope must accompany a Christian, it is love which is in the end of the journey and it is love which is its inspiration.

### ***Loving one's neighbour***

Climacus speaks about *agape* not only towards God, but also, towards others, because 'the second is the proof of the first' (30.25 = 15 = 1157C). Loving God and loving man are mutually dependent: Dorotheos says that ἀγάπη 'is the completion of virtue as the roof completes the house' (*Instr.* XIV.151),

while the *Apophthegmata*, using the same image of a house, state that ‘the foundation is our neighbour’ (*Alph. John the Dwarf* 39).

Climacus’ inspiration is the commandment to love enemies: ‘When you hear that your neighbour or friend has abused you behind your back or even to your face, then show him ἀγάπη and praise him’ (22.15 = 21.13 = 952A)<sup>1</sup>. However, even in the art of loving there are underwater stones. Climacus warns ‘do not wish to assure everyone in words of your ἀγάπη for them, but rather ask God to show them your ἀγάπη without words. Otherwise time will not suffice you in both intimacies and compunction’ (6.22 = 6.23 = 797BC). Climacus warns against a false understanding of ἀγάπη, in the forms of slander (10.4 = 10.3 = 845C), gluttony on the pretext of love and hospitality (14.8 = 14.3 = 864D). He warns that even prayer for loved ones may be produced by the spirit of fornication (15.50 = 15.46 = 889C).

There may be different kinds of love. For Diadochus, love of God is the condition of a true love of neighbour ‘with spiritual perception’ as opposed to ‘friendship after the flesh’, which is easily destroyed by irritation or insult (*Cap. Gnost.* 15). According to Climacus, ἀγάπη between men should be ‘according to God’ (4.36 = 4.31 = 700B), but there is a danger of ‘impure affection’ (26.149 = 26.2-33 = 1065C). Climacus expresses admiration with the ‘indissoluble bond of ἀγάπη’ which he saw in a monastery he had visited, where the monks ‘tried not to wound a brother’s conscience in any way’ (4.14 = 4.16 = 685A). ‘A man will know his brotherly love and his genuine charity when he sees that he mourns for his brother’s sins, and rejoices at his progress and graces’ (4.47 = 4.40 = 705A), writes Climacus. Further on, he develops this thought: ‘You will know that you

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<sup>1</sup>Diadochus also defines ἀγάπη as ‘growing affection (φιλία) for those who abuse us’ (*Def.* 9, also *Cap. Gnost.* 15,16).

have completely got rid of this rot (remembrance of wrongs), not when you pray for the person who has offended you, nor when you exchange presents with him, nor when you invite him to your table, but only when, on hearing that he has fallen into spiritual or bodily misfortune, you suffer and weep for him as for yourself' (9.12 = 9.11 = 841CD). This recalls Evagrius: 'Happy is the monk who views the welfare and the progress of all men as if it were his own' (*De Orat.* 122). Thus, love overcomes alienation, which exists among men between themselves and God. Barsanuphius of Gaza writes, that 'if we had such love, nothing could separate us from each other until death' (*Corr.* 57). Dorotheos is more explicit: 'If we were to love God more, we should be closer to God, and through love of Him we should be more united in love to our neighbour; and the more we are united to our neighbour the more we are united to God' (*Instr.* VI.78).

While love for God makes one forget about oneself, likewise, "loving one's neighbour as oneself" does not mean arithmetic equality between self-love and love to the neighbour. This is why Maximus the Confessor keeps repeating that self-love (φιλαυτία) is 'the mother of all passions' (*Cap. Carit.* II.8, also II.59, III.57), and 'to have it is to have all the passions' (*Ibid.* III.8)<sup>1</sup>. In practical terms, love is precisely a transfer of one's concern for oneself to his neighbour: 'Abba Agathon said: "If I could meet a leper, give him my body and take his, I should be very happy". That indeed is perfect ἀγάπη' (*Apophthegmata Alph.* Agathon 26, see also Agathon 30).

Cassian gives the most explicit theological justification of loving one's neighbour: the ultimate goal of spiritual life is attaining to perfect *agape*, which

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<sup>1</sup> See I. Hausherr. *Philautie. De la tendresse pour soi à la charité selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur*. OCA 137. Roma, 1952.

is the same *agape*, which exists between the Persons of the Trinity: ‘This will be the case when every love, every desire, every effort, every understanding, every thought of ours, everything that we live, that we speak, that we breathe, will be God, and when that unity which the Father now has with the Son and which the Son has with the Father will be carried over into our understanding and our mind, so that, just as He loves us with a sincere and pure and indissoluble love, we too may be joined to Him with a perpetual and inseparable love and so united with Him that whatever we breathe, whatever we understand, whatever we speak, may be God’ (*Conl.* 10.VII.2)<sup>1</sup>.

As we see, for Cassian the Scriptural promise that ‘God will be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15.28) is not only a remote eschatological perspective, but this ‘image of future blessedness’ (*Ibid.* 10.VII.3) is accessible through prayer and love in our present life (cf. *Ibid.* 10.VI.4) and is a primary goal of a solitary (*Ibid.* 10.VII.3).

As we saw earlier on, it is precisely the notion of ἀγάπη, which in the monastic tradition stood behind the understanding of the community life. It is living with a neighbour that enables a monk to fulfil the commandments of the Gospel to love not only God, but a fellow human being.

### ***Ἀγάπη and ἔρως***

Climacus speaks about love, which is not only ἀγάπη, but also ἔρως. While employing the term ἔρως as such, he also employs nuptial imagery throughout the book.

Climacus defines ξενιτεία as ‘abundance of love’ (ἔρωτος πλῆθος) (3.1 = 3.1 = 664B), while speaking about ‘unutterable love (ἔρως ἀμύθητος) for

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<sup>1</sup> B. Ramsey points to the remarkable similarity of his passage with Origen, *De Princ.* 3.6.3. John Cassian: *The Conferences*. Tr. and annotated by B. Ramsey. (ACW vol. 57) New York, Paulist Press 1997. p.391n.

prayer' (25.27 = 25.27 = 996A). The abbot of a monastery, which Climacus had visited, tells him about the 'impure souls raving madly about physical love (ἔρως σωμαίων), but making their experience of carnal love a reason for repentance, they transferred the same love (ἔρως) to the Lord, and, overcoming all fear, they spurred themselves insatiably into the love (ἀγάπη) of God. This is why the Lord does not say of that chaste harlot: "Because she feared", but: "Because she has loved much" (Lk. 7.47), and could easily get rid of love by love (ἔρωτι ἔρωτα διακρούσασθαι)' (5.26 = 5.6 = 777A). Further on, Climacus repeats the expression: 'He is pure who has expelled love with love (ἔρωτι ἔρωτα διακρουσάμενος)' (15.2 = 15.2 = 880D). He then writes: 'As an example of desire (πόθος) for God let carnal love (τῶν σωμαίων ἔρως) serve as a model for you. There is nothing against taking examples of the virtues from what is contrary (τῶν ἐναντίων)' (26.51 = 26-2.31 = 1024BC). In the final chapter Climacus writes: 'There is nothing wrong in representing desire, and fear, and care, and zeal and service and love for God in images borrowed from human life. Blessed is he who has obtained such love (ἔρως) and yearning for God as an enraptured lover has for his beloved' (30.11 = 30.5 = 1156BC). Further on, he continues: 'He who truly loves (ὄντως ἐρῶν) ever keeps in his imagination the face of his beloved, and there embraces it tenderly ... So it is with the bodily things; and so it is with the bodiless.' (30.13 = 30.6 = 1156CD) Climacus once again uses ἔρως in 30.13 = 30.7 = 1156D, and, finally, speaks about ἔρως θεῖος in *Ad Past.* (34 = 1184A).

Climacus' view of love has been severely criticised by Nygren, who, in turn, was criticised by Florovsky for approaching the Fathers from the principles

of 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation<sup>1</sup>. Let us examine Nygren's position in greater detail. Behind his fundamental study *Agape and Eros* there is a fundamental concept: juxtaposition of the Christian idea of agape to the Classical *eros*. Whenever there is a motif of human ascent to God, Nygren suspects that a Neoplatonic framework takes over agape and the Christian integrity of a text is put under question. For example, he believes that the image of Jacob's ladder in Origen is simply a 'biblical legitimation for the introduction of the Eros motif into the Christian idea of love.'<sup>2</sup> With this sort of oversimplified outlook, Climacus becomes an easy target for Nygren. 'There can be no doubt as to the motif under which this "Ladder of paradise" must be placed. The gist of it all is the elevation of the human to the Divine; it is the usual goal of Eros ladder of Hellenistic piety, the ladder of virtue and the mystical ascent. The goal reached by this ladder is the usual goal of Eros piety, ἡσυχία and ἀπάθεια, the soul's rest and exaltation above the passions.'<sup>3</sup> Even the fact that for Climacus the highest step of ascent is ἀγάπη makes Nygren conclude that 'agape is by nature "godlikeness" ... Now this already points in the direction of Eros, and shows that John Climacus does not know Agape in the primitive Christian sense, but has simply taken over the word from Christian tradition'<sup>4</sup>. We hope that our analysis of ἡσυχία and ἀπάθεια in Climacus was sufficient to expose their Christian content. Also, a lot has been written since Nygren on θέωσις, and thus for us there is no necessity to prove the intrinsically Christian meaning of it. However, by stating that the ladder of Climacus is the ladder of Hellenistic piety, Nygren accuses Climacus of creating a view of spiritual life in which union with God is achieved by the

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<sup>1</sup> *Fathers*. pp. 249-252.

<sup>2</sup> *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*. London: SPCK, 1932-1939. 2 Vols. Pt. II. Vol.I. pp. 159-169.

<sup>3</sup> *Eros*. Pt. II. Vol. II. p. 379.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*. p. 380.

initiative of man rather than the initiative of God. This is not a fair evaluation. Indeed, Climacus speaks more about what man has to do, because he implies that the audience is familiar with the Gospel and knows that God did everything that depended on Him.

‘When demons or men praise us for our exile, as for some great exploit or achievement, then let us think of Him who for our sake was exiled from Heaven to earth, and we shall find that throughout all eternity it is impossible for us to make return for this’ (3.22 = 3.30 = 668CD), writes Climacus. Thus, the entire monastic life is seen as a response to the descent of the Divine love. Climacus is also quick to emphasise that the call to monastic life comes ‘from God and not man’ (2.2 = 2.3. = 653D, cf. 1.15 = 1.26 = 637B). Obtaining virtues is by no means a mechanical result of human efforts. Rather, God and man work together. At every time and in every difficulty it is from God that a monk should expect strength and help. The motifs of *synergia*, of the Divine help and co-working with God recur constantly in the *Scala*: ‘If you labour a little, the Lord also will soon work with you (συνεργεῖ)’ (14.24 = 14.19 = 868B, see 1.8 = 1.17 = 636 BC, 26.86 = 26.58 = 1032A and elsewhere). Nygren seems to have had a simple scheme in mind, and attempted to explain all the Fathers with its help. Climacus certainly does not fit it.

As has been pointed out by C. Osborne in her study *Eros Unveiled*<sup>1</sup>, there is no reason to oppose ἀγάπη to ἔρως in the way in which Nygren does. This is true not only with regard to classical authors, but also with regard to Origen, Macarius (see *Coll. H* 4.6 below, also *Ibid.* 25.5), Gregory of Nyssa and Climacus, who do not make a sharp distinction between ἀγάπη and ἔρως .

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Earlier on, we saw that Climacus used the terms interchangeably (5.26 = 5.6 = 777A). Origen, quoting Ignatius of Antioch's famous saying 'My love (ἔρως) is crucified' (Rom. 7.2) concludes that it would make no difference whether to call God *caritas* (= ἀγάπη) or *amor* (= ἔρως) (*Comm. In Cant. Cant. Prol.*). While Gregory of Nyssa accepts the simple definition of ἔρως being 'love which is aroused' (ἐπιτεταμένη ἀγάπη) (*Comm. in Cant. Cant. XIII* = GNO VI. 383. 9), the authors of the *Scholia* on *De Divinis Nominibus* do not hesitate to say that God may be called ἔρως, as well as ἀγάπη - in fact ἔρως is 'more divine' (θειότερον) (*Scholia in lib. De divinis nominibus* IV.12 PG 4. 265A, cf. *ibid.* IV.15 PG 268CD).

Although *eros* and *agape* should not be opposed to each other, they ought to be distinguished. We can see that Climacus uses the word *eros* primarily in a sexual context and he is keen to use nuptial imagery elsewhere. Climacus uses the imagery of man-woman relationship in 7.51 = 7.51 = 813A, where a soul which has fallen away from God is compared to a woman who has lost her husband. He describes θεωρία as 'immaculate marriage' (πάνναγνος γάμος) (7.58 = 7.56 = 813C). Once again, describing union with God in terms of marriage, Climacus compares ἀκηδία of a solitary with adultery (27.29 = 27-2.1 = 1105B). He then describes prayer as 'συνουσία ... ἀνθρώπου καὶ Θεοῦ' (28.1 = 28.1 = 1129A), which certainly has sexual connotations – at least it is with this meaning that his contemporaries Maximus the Confessor (*Lib. Asc. 23, Cap. de Car. II.17*) and John of Damascus (*De Haeres. 80,100, Contra Manich. 82*) employ the term. Climacus himself uses this term to describe union with a bride (25.10 = 25.10 = 992B).



Although Climacus does not interpret the Song of Songs in a direct way, there are a few clear allusions to it in the main body of the book (24.23 = 24.16 = 984A, 27.17 = 27.16 = 1100A), two more times in the chapter on love (30.13 = 30.7 = 1156D, 30.36 = 30.18 = 1160B) (in the first of these passages Climacus alludes to both Cant 5.2 and 5.8). Thus, the plot of the Song of Songs is implicitly underlying the discourse on love, and makes us recall the earlier interpretation of the Song of Songs. Both Origen and Gregory of Nyssa deny any literal value in the Song of Songs. Of course, this is the case not only with this biblical book: according to Origen, the principle of exegesis was in comprehending the spiritual meaning of the text. Thus, he affirms: 'I advise and counsel everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature, to refrain completely from reading this little book and the things that will be said about it.' (*Comm. in Cant Cant. Proem.* 1) Gregory of Nyssa accepts a similar approach in his commentary. It is obvious that the Song of Songs found its place in the Scriptural canon in pre-Christian times because there was none of Origen's caution regarding sexuality – in spite of Origen's claim that 'with the Hebrews also care is taken to allow no one even to hold this book in his hands, who has not reached a full and ripe age' (Prol. 1), the literal plot of the book was not in itself seen as scandalous. There is evidence that in the Jewish circles the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs was not universally accepted<sup>1</sup>. However, in the Christian circles it was not interpreted in any other way.

Earlier on, we see that Climacus brings in the notion of ἐπέκτασις, which Gregory of Nyssa elaborates in, among other works, his *Commentary on the*

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<sup>1</sup> L.G. Schneekloth. *The Targum of the Song of Songs. Study in Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1982. pp. 4-5, 18.

*Song of Songs*. Climacus' inspiration by Gregory of Nyssa may also be suggested by his definition of love as 'inebriation of the soul' (30.7 = 30.3 = 1156B), which has been a subject of separate investigation by Lewy<sup>1</sup>. Lewy identified three Greek patristic authors who make use of the concept: Origen, Eusebius and Gregory of Nyssa, while it also may be found in Theodoretus of Cyrus (*Historia Religiosa epil.* 5), Macarius of Egypt (*Coll. B* 4.9.1, 4.15.8, 5.2.8, 13.2.2, *Coll. H* 8.2, 18.7 50.4), and Diadochus (*Cap. Gnost.* 8). As Climacus does not elaborate on this definition, it is difficult to say to which of the three he owes it – most likely, to Gregory of Nyssa. It is probably not accidental that, while Gregory of Nyssa speaks about 'sober inebriation' mainly in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Climacus brings up the notion, appropriately, in his discourse on love. While Gregory of Nyssa goes on to expound the meaning of the concept, linking it with ecstasy (*Comm. in Cant. Cant.* X = GNO 307-309), Climacus, typically, leaves it unfolded. Interestingly, Gregory and Climacus follow different patterns of interpretation of Cant. 5.2 'I sleep, but my heart is awake'. While Climacus takes it denote the ongoing spiritual activity of the soul, which does not cease during sleep (30.13 = 30.6 = 1156CD, also 20.20 = 19.13 = 941C), Gregory, explaining sleep as the state of insusceptibility, interprets Cant. 5.2 accordingly: the soul in such a state is dead to everything, except God.

Thus, we may suggest that the nuptial imagery in the *Scala* may be inspired by the Song of Songs and patristic commentaries on it. However, this suggestion has to be made with reservation. If we turn to the Macarian homilies, for example, we see that, although both Collections contain only two references to

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<sup>1</sup> H. Lewy. *Sobria ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche; 9. Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1929.

the Song of Songs in *Coll. B*, both Collections are penetrated by nuptial imagery. In a similar mood, Macarius interprets the parable of the ten virgins as souls, who succeed or fail to preserve watchfulness and remain alert. The foolish virgins are understood as the souls, which, being 'held fast by the tie of the world, and by some earthly affection, they did not give their whole love (τὴν ἀγάπην αὐτῶν ὅλην) or passionate devotion (ἔρωσ) to the heavenly Bridegroom' (*Coll. H* 4.6). Thus, Christ is 'the true Beloved' (*Coll. H* 15.19), 'the sweetest and greatly longed for (γλυκύτατον καὶ πολυπόθητον) bridegroom' (*Coll. H* 28.5). Nygren would have rejoiced to find in Macarius the expressions like 'θεῖος ἔρωσ' (*Coll. H* 25.5, *Coll. B* 4.1.4) and 'οὐράνιος ἔρωσ' (*Coll. H* 5.5,6, 10.1, *Coll. B* 1.7.2, 48.2.2), the latter borrowed from the Platonic vocabulary (cf. *Symposium* 185 b).

One has to admit that Climacus is not one of the authors to whom one should turn for the positive view of the physical *eros per se*. As Chrysavgis points out, the usage of bodily *eros* as being τῶν ἐναντίων to virtues indicates that 'for Climacus there is a contrast as well as analogy between carnal and divine love.'<sup>1</sup> In fact, for Gregory of Nyssa, too, the language of bodily ἔρωσ is rather that of **analogy** and **allegory**: 'It teaches us of the need for the soul to reach out to the divine nature's invisible beauty and to love it as much as the body is inclined to love what is akin to itself. The soul must transform πάθος into ἀπάθεια so that when every corporeal affection has been quenched, our mind may seethe with passion for the spirit alone' (*Comm. in Cant. Cant.* I = GNO VI. 27. 8-13).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Notion of 'Divine Eros' in the Ladder of St. John Climacus*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, v. 29, no. 3, 1985, p. 192.

One has to bear in mind, however, that Climacus is not interested in exploring the nature of *eros* – he is specifically addressing a monastic audience, and in this context, bodily *eros* not directed to God is bound to belong to the realm of temptation. Earlier on, we saw the position of Climacus with regard to passions: now we can see that bodily *eros*, like any other human impulse, may be redirected and transfigured through communion with God. Maximus is more explicit than Climacus: ‘For him whose mind is continually with God, even his concupiscence (ἡ ἐπιθυμία) is increased above measure into a divine love (τὸν θεῖον ... ἔρωτα); and the entire irascible element (ὁ θυμός) is changed into divine charity (θείαν ... ἀγάπην). For by continual participation in the divine illumination it has become wholly lightsome and, making the passible element (τὸ παθητικόν) one with itself, it has turned as was said above, to a divine love (εἰς ἔρωτα θεῖον) without end and unceasing charity (ἀγάπην ἀκατάπαυστον), passing over completely from earthly things to the divine’ (*Cap. Carit.* II. 48). Maximus’ entire anthropology is discernible in this passage. He describes ἀγάπη as ‘blessed passion’ (μακάριος πάθος) (*Cap. Carit.* III.67), distinguishing, though, between ‘the blameworthy passion of love’ (πάθος ἀγάπης ψεκτὸν) and ‘the laudable passion of love’ (πάθος ἀγάπης ἐπαινετὸν) (*Cap. Carit.* III.71).

Why, then did the *eros* motif appear in later Christian literature, penetrating the ascetic and the mystical tradition? It may be suggested that it does not occur in early Christianity simply by way of safeguarding Christian identity – while ἀγάπη is totally Scriptural, ἔρωσ would arouse too many non-Scriptural associations, imbedded in Classical thought and pagan tradition. At the same time, in a genre of patristic literature dedicated especially to the subject of

organizing one's inner life, applying *eros* terminology and nuptial imagery to spiritual life is a very powerful means of conveying the intensity of relationship between God and man. It also suggests that love is shared by both God and man as a mutual principle of relationship.

### *AFTERLIFE AND CONCLUSION*

Not only is it important to explore Climacus in the context of the earlier writers, it is also important to look at his reception by the later writers who belonged to the same spiritual tradition. How did they perceive Climacus and what did they see as important in the *Scala Paradisi*? Discussing the reception of Climacus by later authors, the first ones to look at are the other two Sinaite Fathers. In asking the question, whether 'a distinctively Sinaite 'school' of ascetic theology'<sup>1</sup> really existed, we are attempting to define a characteristic strand of Eastern spirituality, represented by such authors as John Climacus, Hesychios of Sinai (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cent.?) and Philotheos of Sinai (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> cent.?).

The theme, which is particularly prominent in the aforementioned writers, is that of νῆψις— usually translated into English as 'watchfulness' or 'vigilance', but meaning literally 'sobriety'. While the treatise of Hesychios bears the title 'On νῆψις and holiness', that of Philotheos is called 'Texts on νῆψις' — in both cases a fair evaluation of contents.

If we look at the earlier writings, we can see that the expression has been present in monastic literature long before Climacus. Dorotheos' tenth discourse

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<sup>1</sup> *The Philokalia : the complete text*. Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth ; translated from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware et al. London : Faber and Faber, 1981. Vol.2. p. 15.

bears the title ‘On travelling the way of God with vigilance and sobriety (μετὰ σκοποῦ καὶ νήψεως)’. Νῆψις occurs in *Vita Antonii* 9, *Apophthegmata* (*Alph.* Theodora 3, Cronius 1, Poemen 165, *Anon.* 52, 66, 81), Evagrius (*Rer. Mon. Rat.* 11, *De Or.* 90), Greek *Life* of Pachomius (*Gl.* 18), and other writings, but never with strictly defined meaning. The Macarian Homilies are more specific in the usage of νῆψις: ‘There is needed a strong guard, νῆψις and prudence ... so that the governing mind (ὁ ἡγεμὼν νοῦς) always possesses, like an armour and a shield, the word of the holy commandments and trust to God, so that in this age it may walk the way of senses (διὰ τῶν ὁδῶν τῶν αἰσθητηρίων) safely and without fear, and place as a guard a straight and pious thought, as a watchman at the gates of the soul, with joy admitting familiar and friendly λογισμοί into the city of the heart, while driving away the malicious and hostile λογισμοί and locking the gates of the heart to wicked thoughts, thus preserving it unconsented to evil altogether (*Coll. B* 25.1.17).

When we turn to the Sinaite fathers, we see that they, linking νῆψις with guarding of mind, the Jesus prayer and ἡσυχία, present νῆψις as a central monastic activity. It receives a definition and becomes a technical term.

In Climacus νῆψις is less clearly defined than in the other two Sinaite fathers. It is used in passing in conjunction with ‘attention’ (προσοχή) (2.12 = 2.17 = 657C, 2.7 = 2.12 = 656D), ‘carefulness’ (τήρησις) and ‘watchfulness’ (φυλακή) (3.80 = 3.75 = 712D). It may refer specifically to the defence against demons (15.53 = 15.50 = 889C). In his discourse on ἡσυχία Climacus uses the word νῆψις only once: a solitary monk ‘has need of great νῆψις and of an unwandering mind’ (27.8 = 27.7 = 1097C). However, the guarding of mind – the

meaning of νῆψις – is central to Climacus’ understanding of ἡσυχία. As we have said earlier, ἡσυχία in Climacus as a state of tranquillity, characterized by inviolability to temptations – precisely because a monk is skilful at guarding his inner gate, thus resisting demonic λογισμοί. ‘A friend of ἡσυχία is a courageous and decisive thought which keeps constant vigil at the doors of the heart, and kills or repels the thoughts that come.’ (27.3 = 27.2 = 1097 AB). ‘The cat keeps hold of her mouse, and the thought of the hesychast holds his spiritual mouse. Do not call this example rubbish; if you do, then you do not yet know what ἡσυχία means’ (27.7 = 27.6 = 1097BC, also 27.72 = 27-2.41 = 1116A).

Looking at Hesychios, we find a number of passages, which indicate familiarity of Hesychios with the *Scala*. (e.g. Hesych. 46/*Scala* 15.74 = 15.73 = 896D-897B, Hesych.100,182,189/*Scala* 27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C, Hesych. 132/*Scala* 27.26 = 27.23 = 1100C, Hesych. 148/*Scala* 26.80 = 26.52 = 1029C, 27.6 = 27.5 = 1097B , Hesych. 198/*Scala* 9.9 = 9.8 = 841C, Hesych. 201/*Scala* 27.28 = 27.26 = 1101A). We also see that while for Climacus νῆψις is simply a descriptive term, for Hesychios it becomes technical<sup>1</sup>: he begins the treatise by giving it an all-embracing definition: ‘Νῆψις is a spiritual method, which, if sedulously practised over a long period, completely frees us with God’s help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words and evil actions ... It teaches us how to activate the three aspects of our soul correctly, and how to keep a firm guard over the senses. It promotes the daily growth of the four principal virtues, and is the basis of our contemplation.’ (1) Later on he says that νῆψις ‘is a way embracing every virtue, every commandment’ (3). Hesychios relates it mainly to

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of νῆψις in Hesychios see Azovkin. *Hesychios*. pp. 23-76.

signify defence against what ‘the Fathers’<sup>1</sup> call a provocation introduced into the heart by the devil’ (2). The overall picture of spiritual life in Hesychios is that of warfare with the demons and defence against their mental provocations. In this context, his insistence upon νῆψις is quite understandable. If one’s heart is constantly subject to demonic provocations, and is impossible for sin to enter the heart except as a thought or fantasy (45, 89, 118, 178, 180), νῆψις, as ‘a continual fixing and halting of thought at the entrance to the heart’ (6) becomes vital, for ‘if with the help of Jesus we instantly quell the thought, we will avoid its corresponding outward action.’ (88) However, νῆψις is not simply a defending technique *per se* – it is closely linked with the Jesus prayer. The particular importance of the Jesus prayer regarding νῆψις comes from the particular power of the ‘venerable name of Jesus’ (20) and our weakness against the demonic slyness (24, 26). ‘If we trust only in our own watchfulness and attentiveness, we shall quickly be pushed aside by the enemies. We shall be overturned and cast down by their extreme craftiness. We will become ever more fully entangled in their nets of evil thought, and will readily be slaughtered by them, lacking as we do the powerful sword of the name of Jesus Christ’, warns Hesychios (152). ‘You will not find a greater help than Jesus in all your life, for He alone, as God, knows the deceitful ways of the demons, their subtlety and their guile’ (39). The combination of the two makes the Jesus prayer central to Hesychios’ treatise.

The link of ἡσυχία with νῆψις is also an obvious one in Hesychios: he calls ἡσυχία ‘the heart’s νῆψις and, when free from mental images, it is the guarding of the intellect’ (3). While Climacus draws an image of a cat hunting a

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<sup>1</sup> He may be speaking about Climacus: see pp. 79-80.



mouse to illustrate ἡσυχία, Hesychios draws an image of a spider hunting flies (27). Both authors make the same point— inner peace and stability may only be achieved at the cost of effective defence.

The shorter treatise of Philotheos of Sinai, who refers to Climacus as ‘god-bearing man’ reads like a continuation of Hesychios’ treatise; the same themes are developed. The author draws similar picture of warfare with demons on the noetic plane (1, 7), in which ‘both sides prepare their weapons, devise stratagems, clash in fearful battle, gain victories and suffer defeats’ (7). Again, while νῆψις is emphasised, the Jesus prayer and guarding the heart complement each other (2): ‘When you perceive an evil thought, rebut it and immediately call upon Christ to defend you; and while you are still speaking, Jesus in His gentle love will say: ‘Behold, I am by your side ready to help you.’’(26).

If the Sinaite tradition can be characterised by the special emphasis on νῆψις and the Jesus prayer, we see that Climacus, while joining together the three notions, leaves the synthesis undeveloped. Although in the *Scala* ἡσυχία receives a separate treatment for the first time, nevertheless references to νῆψις are scattered. While Climacus has four passages in the entire *Scala* relating (or possibly relating) to the Jesus prayer, and uses the expression ‘Jesus prayer’ only once, Hesychios, in a much shorter treatise, uses the expression 14 times, excluding passing references. Moreover, Hesychios refers thrice to Climacus’ celebrated apophthegm on the Jesus prayer, but nowhere does he allude to Climacus’ sayings on νῆψις. Some themes, elaborated by Hesychios, have no place in the *Scala*. Both Hesychios and Philotheos frequently use the classical anthropological tripartite division of soul – Climacus does so only once, in passing (*Ad Past.* 100 = 1205A). They also make use of the notion of four

chief virtues, which in Climacus appear in passing only (*Ad Past.* 100 = 1205B). Thus, while Hesychios and Philotheos represent a distinctive tradition, Climacus may also be seen as belonging to it, but with a certain caution.

Symeon the Studite, mentor of Symeon the New Theologian, was influenced by Climacus in his ascetic doctrine<sup>1</sup>. Climacus also inspired Symeon the New Theologian himself. Although there only two direct quotations from Climacus in Symeon's writings<sup>2</sup>, one can discern Climacus' influence in Symeon's teaching on the imitation of passions<sup>3</sup>, struggle with anger by means of πένθος<sup>4</sup>, and especially in his teaching on repentance and tears as second baptism<sup>5</sup>, as well as in other issues<sup>6</sup>. Völker suggested that in his teaching on spiritual guidance Symeon simply reproduces the ideas of Climacus<sup>7</sup> - a statement, however, disputed by other scholars<sup>8</sup>.

Climacus' influence is discernible in the hesychast tradition. Like Climacus, Gregory of Sinai makes use of the 'ladder' image (although consisting only of five rungs) (*Cap.* 120-1 PG 150 1284CD). Several times he refers to Climacus more explicitly: he quotes Climacus' instruction to 'flog the enemy with the name of Jesus' (21.7 = 20.6 = 945 C) (*Praec. ad Hesych.* 4 PG 150. 1332D, *De Quietud.* 2 PG 150, 1316C), quotes the instruction to unite the Jesus prayer with breath (27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C) in *De Quietud.* 3 PG 1316D, quotes 27.46 = 27-2.12 = 1109B in *De Quietud.* 4 PG 1317C, quotes 27.23 = 27.21 = 1100B in *De Quietud.* 4 PG 1317B, quotes 27.62 = 27-2.27 = 1112C in

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<sup>1</sup> Alfeyev. *Introduction.* to p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Alveyev. *Symeon.* p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106-107, 205, 210-213.

<sup>6</sup> W. Völker. *Praxis und Theoria bei Symeon dem Neuen Theologen: ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Mystik.* Wiesbaden, 1974. *passim.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 111-129

<sup>8</sup> H.J.M. Turner. *St Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood.* Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1990. *passim.*

*De Quietud* 8 PG 1320 D – 1321A, quotes 7.52 = 7.51 = 813A in *De Quietud*. 9 PG 132 C, quotes 27.78 = 27-2.47 = 1116C in *De Quietud*. 11 PG 1324C, quotes 7.64 = 7.64 = 816A in *De Quietud*. 14 PG 1328B, adopts the definition of ἡσυχία as ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων (27.51 = 27-2.17 = 1112A) in *Praec. ad Hesych.* 5 PG 1333B, quotes 27.77 = 27-2.47 = 1116C in *Praec. ad Hesych.* 5 = PG 1333B, quotes 28.1 = 28.1 = 1129B in *Praec. ad Hesych.* 5 1333D, quotes 26.92 = 26.64 = 1033B in *Praec. ad Hesych.* 5 PG 1336A.

Gregory Palamas also makes use of Climacus, especially in his *Triads*: he adopts the definition of a ἡσυχαστής as someone who ‘strives to confine his incorporeal being within his bodily house’ (27.6 = 27.5 = 1097B) (I.II.6), he seems to refer to Climacus’ discourse on insensitivity (esp. 18.5 = 17.5 = 933C) in II.II.7, quotes 6.13 = 6.14 = 796B in II.II.7, adopts the definition of prayer as the mother and daughter of tears (28.1 = 28.1 = 1129A.) in II.II.7, uses Climacus’ expression ‘blessed πένθος’ (7.4 = 7.6 = 804 A) in II.II.7, and the definition of tears as wings of prayer (28.14 = 28.13 = 1132C) in II.II.17, quotes 7.55 = 7.43 = 813B in I.III.52, quotes 27.78 = 27-2.47 = 1116C in II.I.11, repeats after Climacus (7.6 = 7.8 = 804AB) that ‘greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears’ (II.II.17), quotes 29.9 = 29.6 = 1149A in II.II.19, quotes Climacus’ exhortation to unite the remembrance of Jesus with breath (27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C) in II.II.25, repeats after Climacus that it is ὁρπαγή πρὸς Κύριον which is the perfection of prayer (28.19 = 28.20 = 1132 D) in II.III.35.

Another 14<sup>th</sup> century hesychast manual to the Jesus prayer, the centuries of Kallistos and Ignatius Xanthopoulos, are also full of references to Climacus (they quote 4.7 = 4.9 = 681A , 26.53 = 26-3.45 = 1089B and 4.5 = 4.6 = 680C in

14, 4.10 = 4.13 = 681B in 15, 4.105 = 4.105 = 717B in 15, 4.8 = 4.10 = 681A in 15, 27.68 = 27-2.34 = 1113B in 16, 27.51-52 = 27-2.17-18 = 1109D-1112A in 16, 27.46 = 27-2.12 = 1109B in 16, 27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C in 22, 7.31 = 7.33 = 808B in 25, 27.77 = 27-2.47 = 1116C in 26, 28.1 = 28.1 = 1129A in 29, 28.1 = 28.1 = 1129B in 29, 28.25 = 28.28 = 1133C in 29, 6.13 = 6.14 = 796B in 32, 25.14 = 25.14 = 992D in 37, 27.6 = 27.5 = 1097B in 47, 27.17 = 27.16 = 1100A in 47, 27.18 = 27.17 = 1100A in 47, once again 27.61 = 27-2.26 = 1112C in 49, 21.7 = 20.6 = 945C in 49, 28.45 = 28.47 = 1137A in 54, 27.21 = 27.20 = 1100AB in 72, 28.19 = 28.20 = 1132D in 73, 7.55 = 7.53 = 813B in 76, 7.31 = 7.33 = 808B in 81, 7.33 = 7.35 = 808C in 81, 7.35 = 7.37 = 808C in 81, 7.66 = 7.67 = 816B in 81, 7.66 = 7.67 = 816B in 83, 30.1-9 = 30.1-4 = 1153D-1156B in 90, 28.52 = 28.52 = 1137C in 92).

A mere glance at the parallels between Climacus and the authors we have discussed indicates that most quotations from Climacus are taken from his discourse on ἡσυχία, or they are of direct relevance to the subject. There is almost a standard set of sayings from the *Scala*, to which they refer. The connection of the Jesus prayer with breathing, to which Climacus alludes, in later authors was certain, and they had no doubt in seeing Climacus as an advocate of this technique. It is extraordinary that Climacus, whose sayings, relating to the invocation of Jesus, are occasional and ambiguous, was to become one of the greatest authorities on the Jesus prayer. This may be only explained by the fact that, together with these few references he provides complete theological and ascetical foundation for hesychasm, especially in his section on ἡσυχία, which was quoted so often.

However, as A. Rigo and A-E. Tachiaos illustrate, both in Byzantium and in the Slavonic world the *Scala* pervaded all levels of spirituality, appealing to coenobites and solitaries, monks and laypeople<sup>1</sup>. Symeon the New Theologian found the *Scala* in the library of his father, who was a government official<sup>2</sup>, while A-E. Tachiaos finds influence of Climacus in the writings of Vladimir Monomach (Prince of Kiev in 1113-1125)<sup>3</sup>. Nil Sorskiy, known as a defender of community monasticism and the exponent of struggle against passions and noetic prayer<sup>4</sup>, had Climacus as one of his main inspirations. In his writing scholars have found 35 quotations from Climacus<sup>5</sup>, while in the writings of his opponent, Joseph of Volotsk (or Volokolamsk), 24 adoptions have been found<sup>6</sup>. Paisy Velichkovsky had the *Scala* as one of his main inspirations, and drew heavily upon it, especially in his defence of the Jesus prayer<sup>7</sup>.

The *Scala* was translated into other languages quite early. A Syriac translation in the British Library (Add. MS 14593) bears the date 817<sup>8</sup>, while a Latin translation was made at least in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. The first Slavonic manuscript in existence dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>. Among the first books to be

<sup>1</sup> *Giovanni Climaco a Bisanzio*. In: *Giovanni Climaco e il Sinai*. Edizioni Qiqajon. Comunità di Bose. 2002. p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Vie*. 6. 21-39.

<sup>3</sup> *Note sull'Irriadiamento della "Scala" nel Mondo Slavo*. In: *Giovanni Climaco e il Sinai*. Edizioni Qiqajon. Comunità di Bose. 2002. pp. 213-214.

<sup>4</sup> G.A. Maloney. *Russian Hesychasm: The Spirituality of Nil Sorskiy*. Westmalle. 1964, Архим. Иустин. Преподобный и богоносный отец наш Нил, подвижник Сорский и Устав его о скитской жизни, Москва 1902. и С. Большаков. *Преподобный Нил Сорский*. МЕРР 9, 1960. pp. 46-58.

<sup>5</sup> Maloney. *Hesychasm*. p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> T. Spidlik. *Joseph de Volokolamsk: un chapitre de la spiritualité russe*. Roma: Pont. institutum orientalium studiorum, 1956 (OCA 146). p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Об умной или внутренней молитве. Сочинение блаженного старца схимонаха и архимандрита Паисия Величковскаго, настоятеля Немецкаго и других монастырей в Молдавии и основателя Русскаго Ильинскаго скита на Афоне. Издание Афонскаго Русскаго Пантелеимонова монастыря*. Moscow, 1902.

<sup>8</sup> W. Wright. *Catalogue of Syrian Manuscripts in the British Museum*. London. 1870-72. Part II, pp. 590ff.

<sup>9</sup> K. Krumbacher. *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Munich, 1897, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> *Сводный каталог славяно-русских рукописных книг, хранящихся в СССР, XI-XIII вв.* Moscow. 1884. pp. 104-105.

published in America was a Spanish edition of the *Scala*, published in Mexico in the 16<sup>th</sup> century under the title *Escala spiritual de San Juan Climaco*<sup>1</sup>.

Although in the West the *Scala* has never become as popular as in the East, there is a history of its reception in the West as well<sup>2</sup>. Dionysius the Carthusian (otherwise known as Denys van Leeuwen or Denys Rickel) wrote a lengthy commentary on it. Father Robert of St Bernard's Abbey, who prepared the first English edition of the *Scala*, justified his translation by stating that, although the *Scala* contains many instructions relating specifically to monks, it nevertheless contains 'excellent instructions for all classes of Christians', because 'the virtues which compose the Holy Ladder, by which we are to mount to the summit of Christian perfection, are no other than the virtues inculcated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ'<sup>3</sup>.

It is this integral vision of Climacus which makes the *Scala Paradisi* the definitive introduction into the Orthodox understanding of life κατὰ Θεοῦ.

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The essence of the monastic life is the struggle with passions and the attainment of ἀπάθεια. It is obvious that in his understanding of these issues Climacus is an heir to Evagrius. Evagrian terminology, his scheme of eight passions, and his teaching on ἀπάθεια are recognizable without difficulty in the *Scala*. As far as the emergence of passion is concerned, the dependence upon Mark is unmistakable, but, as K. Ware points out, Marcan terminology is also rooted in Evagrius. As far as Climacus' attitude towards the body is concerned, he may be seen as an heir to the earlier monastic tradition. While using dualistic

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<sup>1</sup> H.R. Wagner. *Nueva bibliografía mexicana del siglo XVI*, Mexico, 1940, pp. 5-8, 508.

<sup>2</sup> M. Cortese. *La Ricezione della "Scala" in Occidente*. In: *Giovanni Climaco e il Sinai*. Edizioni Qiqajon. Comunità di Bose. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Ladder of Perfection, by which we may ascend to Heaven*. Translated by Father Robert, Mount St. Bernard's Abbey. Publisher: London, 1858. pp. VI-VII.

language, Climacus is far from being Manichean in his view of the body. He expands the meaning of ἀπάθεια to embrace the life of the transfigured body as well as the life of the soul, and continues the patristic approach to ἀπάθεια as a way of organizing the inner life and natural impulses.

Climacus speaks about prayer as being the activity of both νοῦς and καρδιά. Developing the theology of μνήμη θανάτου, Climacus sees it as a vital aspect of prayer. Climacus also develops the traditional theme of tears in prayer, and comes up with the original formula of tears as ‘second baptism’. Climacus inherited the notion of ‘pure prayer’ from Evagrius, and his understanding of prayer as the chief task of a monk leads him to a view of labour less respectful than that of the earlier Fathers. There is every reason to believe that Climacus speaks about the Jesus prayer as we know it, although there is no reason to believe that its usage was widespread. Although Climacus remains inarticulate about such phenomena as vision of light in prayer, he was familiar with them, and the references in the *Scala* are sufficient to indicate that he belongs to the same current in the Orthodox spirituality as Diadochus, Macarius of Egypt and, later, Symeon the New Theologian.

Climacus expresses the traditional belief in the participation of the invisible world in the spiritual life of an individual. While refraining from describing demonic assaults in crude and materialistic terms, Climacus describes demons in Evagrian fashion, speaking about ‘the demon of ὀκηδία’, ‘the demon of πορνεία’ etc. he demonstrates particular insight regarding the demonic attacks and the ways to resist them.

As far as his understanding of the monastic ideal is concerned, Climacus’ position is similar to that of Cassian. While he believes that the solitary way of

the monastic life is greater than life in the coenobium, he understands that only a few are capable of it. He gives preference to the middle way, as it helps to avoid the specific temptations associated with life in solitude and in community.

Climacus' vision of the spiritual fatherhood is also traditional. He emphasises the importance of obedience on the part of a disciple and the importance of διάκρισις on the part of a guide, both being equally important as conditions of following the will of God. Thus, the notion of the submission of the will of man to the will of God becomes the pivotal axis of Climacus' theology.

Climacus' understanding of love as the summit of the spiritual life betrays the influence of Gregory of Nyssa, but, most importantly, it emphasises his vision of the monastic life as the fulfilment of the Gospel, and, above all, the command to love.

A survey of Climacus' afterlife indicates that it is the concept of ἡσυχία which is of utmost importance to his theology. Although it was not Climacus' invention, it was ἡσυχία as exposed by Climacus, which was to become a cornerstone of hesychasm and its understanding of the Jesus prayer.



## ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum. Ed. E. Schwartz (Berlin).
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers (New York).
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers (Edinburgh - Michigan).
CS	Cistercian Studies (Kalamazoo, Michigan).
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna).
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers (Washington).
DTC	Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique (Paris).
DS	Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ed. M. Viller (Paris).
FC	Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC).
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller (Leipzig - Berlin).
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera (Leiden).
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (London).
MEPR	Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarchate Russe en Europe Occidentale (Paris).
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Edinburgh - Michigan).
OC	Orientalia Christiana (Rome).
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta (Rome).
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica (Rome).
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris).
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris).
PPTS	Palestinian Pilgrim's Text Society (London).
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien, ed. K. Aland and E. Mühlenberg (Berlin-New York).
SC	Sources Chrétiennes (Paris).
SP	Studia Patristica (Papers of the International Conference on Patristic Studies. Berlin, Oxford, Kalamazoo).
SVF	Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta ed. (4 vols, Leipzig 1923-38).
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur (Leipzig-Berlin).

*Φιλοκαλία*     *Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν*, vols. I-V (Athens, 1957-1963).

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υρίας περὶ τῶν αἰρουμένων ἡσυχῶς βι-  
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